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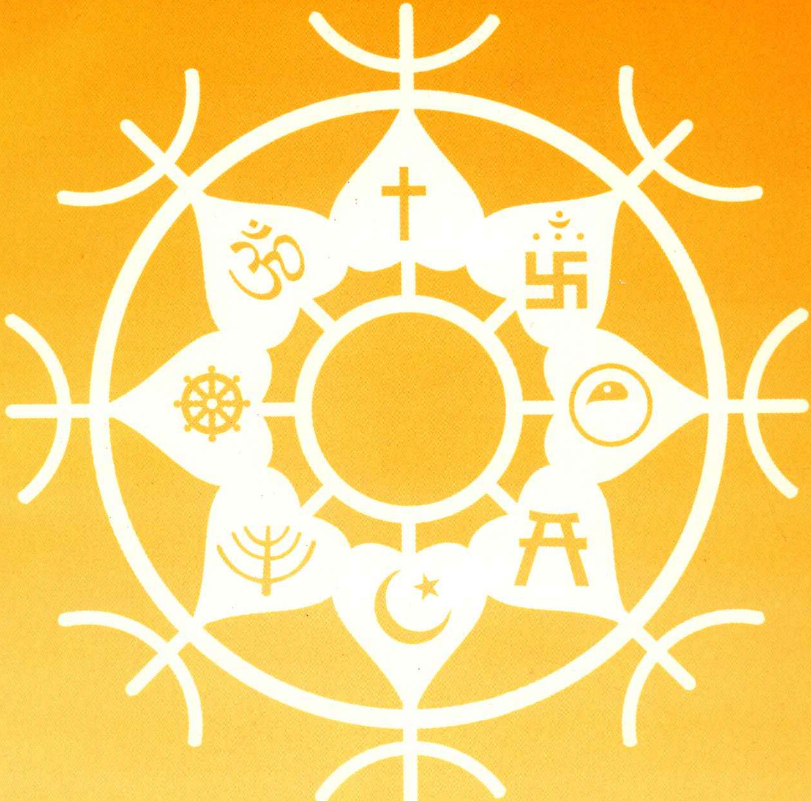

GENDER AND RELIGION

October-December 2011 Vol. 36, No. 4

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DVK, Dharmaram College P. O.
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Email: dharma@dvk.in

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GENDERED RELIGION

Autoethnography as a Methodological Tool in Religion Studies

Maheshvari Naidu◆

1. Introduction

This paper engages with and utilises autoethnography as methodological tool in research. The paper is in part a personal narrative and an auto-ethnographic account of some of my experiences (as female researcher) in choosing to undertake postgraduate study into particular aspects of gendered religion. It is also an engagement with the merits of using autoethnography as a qualitative research methodology in the Humanities and Social Sciences in the sharing of the research and research experience. Autoethnography refers to instances when the autobiographical material of the author is woven into the sharing of the research, and where the author does not feign an absence from the research process and documentation. Autoethnography uses the autobiographical materials of the researcher as the principal data and emphasizes cultural analysis and interpretation of the researcher's thoughts and experiences in relationship to others in the research field.[1]

I was aware that anthropological narrative genres welcome the researcher as part of the research process and are supportive of narrative styles that include the researcher as a full participant in the final research text. My own research, however, was situated at the disciplinary intersection of Anthropology and History of Religions. Adopting a personal narrative style, would have formed an uneasy alliance with History of Religions where the researcher more usually than not adopts a dispassionate distance. I confess that there was thus a level of intellectual angst in suppressing some aspects of the research narrative where my own 'voice' emerged within the research process as I was attentive to the fact that I was writing within both disciplinary as well as institutional

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◆**Dr. Maheshvari Naidu** lectures in Anthropology in the School of Anthropology, Gender and Historical Studies, at the University of KwaZulu Natal South Africa. Her research interests are Anthropology of religion, Feminist anthropologies, Female Body Construction, Transnationalised Hinduism and Identity and Alterity.

[1] Adams, Tony E. and Jones Stacy Holman, "Telling Stories: Reflexivity, Queer Theory, and Autoethnography," *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies*, vol. 11.2, 2011, 108-116.

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expectations. This paper is thus liberating as it is positioned within an autoethnographic framework that not only allows such an inclusion of the 'personal,' but indeed welcomes it.

The paper follows the path of three 'moments' in the personal 'telling' of the study of religion.[2] Although I share vignettes of these stories in different sections, the nature of the task means that these moments do not stay confined to their own section and are not necessarily chronologically told, but at times 'bleed' into the telling of each other. The first moment I shall refer to as broad choice of *wide area of study*, (religion and feminism), the second as specific and *narrow research focus* (gender, feminism and the Hindu goddess Meenakshi), the third as *female studying religion* (women and religion studies). All the narrative 'moments' are embraced within the methodological tool of autoethnography.

As I look back over my shoulder reflexively, I am appreciative of the fact that my intellectual roots are wonderfully adventitious and wide spread. They go back to my early days in comparative religion, what was referred to as 'Science of Religion' in my University, with focus on the majors in Hinduism and Indology. From there I moved organically *into the discipline of Anthropology* (as a young Masters student) and *into the Department of anthropology* (as a young academic). It was at this juncture that events began to unfold and re-knit themselves together in a rather exciting and synchronistic manner. After agonising for some interminable weeks (much in keeping with the trend of the typical Masters candidate tasked with 'finding' their unique research voice), I suddenly knew implicitly that I wished to study in the broad area of 'Gender and Religion.' I was already employed as an associate lecturer at the then University of Westville in Durban, South Africa. Like other faculty members, I was free, as soon as the students had completed their examinations, and I the marking of those papers, to take a rather extended leave. This leave straddled the end of one academic year in November-December into the new calendar year of lectures in the following year. I decided that I would use this three months break to undertake fieldwork in that land conceived by me as exotic and alluring, India!

This decision heralded my fluid move from religion studies, specifically Hindu Studies at the University of Westville, into

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[2] I use the broad referential term 'religion' consciously even though my specific focus is Hinduism. This is because my focus on South Asian and Hindu is cast against the wider canvas of comparative religion and feminist religion.

Anthropology of religion. The decision to focus on aspects of gendered religion proclaimed a further intellectual shift into anthropology of gender and feminism, or feminist anthropologies. Wishing to go to India to undertake ethnographic fieldwork was very much in keeping with the disciplinary imperatives of anthropology. Wishing to undertake that ethnography in the distant land of India (from South Africa) was very much in keeping with the clichéd understanding that the anthropologist had to trudge off (Victorian style) to some 'exotic' land and undertake the *doing* of research with the so called 'native other.' Clichéd or not, I was rather naively intent at that time on (intellectually) discovering that exotic land. I had already amassed a general and cursory lay of the land in two previous visits when I backpacked through the northern and southern states. This time I was setting off, having adjusted my gaze from tourist to researcher, and I was eager to get underway.

2. Moment: Religion and Feminism

Phenomenological understandings of religion and religious experiences make it clear that religion is something experientially intimate to the believer, and that the outsider, in a sense can have no real access to these experiences, much less the right to critique them. However, feminist and other critical and deconstructive theories lay bare the fact that, *outside* of the believers' experience of his/her religion, there exists multiple religious 'realities' that are mediated by institutional and political disciplinary frameworks of power. Feminist theories are especially alert to codes of hegemonic prescription and political contexts that position women outside the constructed normative frames of reference. I was aware that 'gender' as a category and 'site' of analysis, need not only include the female population but rather referred to the fluidly negotiated terms of (asymmetrical) reference that (was made to) distinguish males from females. I was also acutely aware that these terms of reference were in reality rigidly constructed in many patriarchal cultures to the extent that women were ascribed gender roles that painted them outside many structures of institutions, religion being one of these. That being said, I was keen to focus on gender and religion by looking at more specifically *women and religion*.

It seemed a perfect 'excuse' to allow the budding feminist in me to begin to intellectually engage with 'feminism' in relation to religion. Of course not all work on 'gender' draws upon feminist theory. However, I found myself drawn to the paradigms in feminist thinking. One of my favourite Journals, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (JFSR), described that, as feminists, their writings attempted to "work within a theoretical framework that analysed the intersections of gender, race, class, and other structures of domination."[3] I had also just attended a presentation by a female professor in Theology who had pioneered a course on gender and religion and who pointed out in impassioned words, that *both* women's studies and religion studies were relatively marginalized scholarly disciplines in the academy. This was all that I needed to hear, that the subjects that I was passionately interested in, were disciplinary underdogs so to speak. This talk was the catalyst that further cemented the direction of my studies.

I knew that I wanted to travel to some location, geographically far (far) flung from where I was at that moment. I also knew that I had to find a research space where I could engage on a personal and scholarly level with issues of gender and religion and turn my gaze on how religious subjectivities, norms and practices come to be hegemonically sculpted. During my backpacker wanderings through India I had visited the city of Madurai and the beautifully towered temple of Meenakshi Amman. Most importantly for the particular direction that my personal story was destined to follow, I had also heard in conversations with people living in Madurai, that the Madurai Meenakshi Temple was distinctive in an exceptional way. Many of these devotees spoke especially reverentially of the goddess Meenakshi here. This was not by any means unusual in the multi-stranded and polyvocal tradition of Hinduism with an emphatic focus on goddess worship. However, there was something remarkably atypical here. For when I had visited the temple, I had been cautioned by my (local) companions that I ought to always proceed to the shrine of the goddess before entering that of Siva. I recall making a mental note when told by the people around that all rituals were first offered to *Amman* (Mother goddess) before being offered to the god Siva. I remember catching myself reacting to this unusual tradition not practiced at the other major Saiva temple in South India, Chidambaram, and which appeared to be peculiar to the Saiva Meenakshi Temple. For in all other major Saiva temples in India "worship of the mother follows the worship of Siva."[4]

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[3] This statement is part of their publishing philosophy and appears on the website as a description of 'who they are,' as feminists, and 'what they do.'

[4] Subramanium, R. Parartha Puja, in S. S. Janali, ed., *Siva Temple and Temple Ritual*, Madras: Kuppusami Sastri Res. Institute, 1988, 77.

Thus, this rather peculiar (and pleasing) 'ritual reversal' piqued my curiosity and appealed to the feminist in me at that time. This curiosity and fascination in the reversal of the order of ritual was something that I was to later pursue as part of my Masters Studies. It was this *encounter* with what appeared as the 'ritual prerogative' afforded to the goddess that drew me to the temple and to the city of Madurai. To me this peculiarity had significant implications in terms of the theology of the gods. It was also clear from the behaviour of the other temple goers that the ritual protocol, what Laidlaw would describe as "ritual commitment"[5] of proceeding to the shrine of the goddess first, was not to be made light of and that any indiscretion on their part, or mine for that matter would anger the goddess and we in turn would be visited upon by grave misfortune. The rule that the goddess' shrine was to be visited first was widely pervasive and certainly not restricted to the Brahmin classes in the Madurai community. I found that regardless of which class of which of the Hindu traditions I observed, that even a child of five was conversant with this religious protocol.

The research space and site was thus decided. It was to be the city of Madurai. My Masters proposal described that I aimed to probe the ritual order and power dynamics in the context of the Madurai Meenakshi Temple. After presenting the proposal to my school and taking heed of their theoretical and methodological advice I excitedly booked my passage to India. I recall quite vividly that my supervisor was almost as excited as I was! The old classic Hollywood movie '*Planes, Trains and Automobiles*' perhaps sums up my flight from South Africa into the north Indian city of Bombay and a long distance train haul from Bombay to Madras. The last leg into the city was by that ubiquitous of Indian vehicles, the auto-rickshaw. However, even before the Vaigai Express pulled into the Madurai Station I had a wonderful introduction to the city.

My very first introduction to the city of Madurai and the Madurai Meenakshi Temple as a research space was through the conductor of the train that I was travelling on. He was himself from Madurai and seeing me, asked if I was visiting family in Madurai. I explained that I was a student from South Africa and I intended doing some fieldwork in the city related to the temple activities. His response was almost immediate: 'Ah, but once you have set foot within the city of Madurai you have set foot within the temple. You see the city limits are the temple gates.'

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[5] Humphrey, Caroline and Laidlaw, James, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, 88.

With this sort of introduction I was almost tempted to look around for the temple elephant as I alighted from the train. What greeted me was the dense traffic of Madurai. As I was driven in search of accommodation I caught sight of four tall structures dominating the afternoon horizon. When the vehicle drew closer I realised that these structures were in reality temple towers that reached majestically into the sky. Later in the day, walking around the streets of the city I took in the sights and sounds of the city. These sights being new to me, I remember looking around for a corner so that I could make a note of everything I saw before I became, with the passage of time, more accustomed and naturalised to them. I observed the constant stream of people entering and leaving the temple. I overhead parents shouting 'Siva', 'Sundara', 'Meena', etc., with more familiarity than one would expect from devotees calling their god until I saw that it was to their children that the calls were addressed. And as I observed the many stores and autos even, named after Siva or Meenakshi (in one or more of the many permutations of their names) I began to get the sense of the complexities of the land. Madurai, it said, is owned by the gods Siva and Meenakshi and is comprehended as sacred by the Tamil Saiva devotees of Madurai. The Meenakshi Temple stands in the centre of the squarely organised ancient inner city, constructed in a *mandala* style.

When the city itself is modelled on the lines of the temple, the city, in term of religious sentiment becomes a temple. Diana Eck's description of Madurai is one worth repeating. Eck states that:

> A direct parallel to the structure of a temple may be seen in the city of Madurai in Tamilnad, where the city is laid out in the shape if *mandala* [ritual closed polygon space]. At the centre is the temple compounded of Minakshi and Sudaresvara, with its all, elaborately carved gateways, called *gopurams*, in the four directions. Around the temple are three concentric square processional streets. Here an entire city has been built according to the plan of [the texts] the silpasastras, and the plan is precisely that of the *vastupurusha mandala* [closed polygon space of the existing Cosmic Being] which delimits the sacred space of the temple. The city is the cosmos, bounded from forces of disorder which the *mandala* establishes.[6]

I was reminded of the words of the train conductor, '...once you have set foot in the city you have set food within the temple. The city limits are the temple gates.'

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[6] Eck, Diana L., *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, New York: Anima Books, 1981.

And inside the actual temple precinct itself, the vibrancy was quite captivating. The aroma from the flower sellers' stalls, the music blaring out in unlikely jostle from the several tightly packed shops around the temple, and the constant traffic of people entering and leaving the temple tangibly inscribed the city in a way that was immediately experienced. Robert Levy's study invited attention to how Bhaktapur's sacralised space acted to organising the meaning of the city.[7] By this Levy was saying that in Bhaktapur, much of the time, space, status and psychological life of the city is organised by sacred symbols. Pretty much the same can be said for the city of Madurai where the power of the sacralised space inhabited by the gods Siva and Meenakshi also serves to organise much of the meaning of the city in terms of the believer's perception of herself and her place in the world. In the period of three months that I undertook my fieldwork I was fortunate to have lived with families in Madurai and I consciously dressed to resemble a 'local.' I was able to converse fairly comfortably in the local vernacular of Tamil, which greatly assisted in gaining me entry to the homes of my informants, many of whom were Brahmin. I was able to intimately observe that, for all categories of Madurai devotees, Brahmin and non Brahmin, male and female, the power of the sacralised space and the concentrated presence of the gods within the temple, appeared to permeate their lives in a very palpable way. This was something I could also immediately discern just by positioning myself outside the temple.

Positioned thus, I observed the brisk trade of the ubiquitous temple flower sellers as well as their presence late into the night which complimented the constant stream of traffic entering and leaving the temple and further underpinned the centrality of temple going. Within the space of a few minutes one evening I observed a baby, who could not have been more than a few weeks old at most and swaddled in a towel, being brought in for the blessing of the gods Siva and Meenakshi. A rather ancient looking Brahmin hobbled in on his stick, and children, as if on an exciting fieldtrip, tumbled in at approximately eight o'clock by which time the temple was very crowded and busy. By nine that night the temple was comparatively speaking, more crowded and much busier. I remember writing in my notebook, regarding the matter-of-fact manner in which the worship was carried out '*that was not exactly mechanical, that it was almost like breathing – something you not think about but is just done*'.

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[7] Levy Robert, "The Power of Space in a Traditional Hindu City," *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, vol. 1.3, 1997, 55-71.

It was clear to me that while the gods Siva and Meenakshi were felt as present throughout the length of Madurai, their presence, as far as the devotee was concerned, was tangibly experienced within the temple precincts and more precisely defined in the *garbagrha* (inner sanctum, literally womb house). If one had to translate in lay terms the exigencies of the sacrality of temple space, perhaps the words of one of my informants whom I caught just as he was about to enter the temple, best sums it up. The informant, referring to the temple claimed that, "While it may be that god is everywhere, he is more so in the temple."

I smiled as I remembered that *agamic* textual tradition also tells us that the temple is the place where the god 'lives.' The temple is thus accepted by multiple categories of believers as being the dwelling place of the gods. The present urbanised city of Madurai has of course expanded far beyond the four angled parameters of the ancient city of the Sangam period. And while Sewell makes the point that by the late nineteenth century Madurai is no longer functionally dominated by religious institutes,[8] yet much of the time, space and psychological life is here still organised by sacred symbols within the city space that the gods Meenakshi and Siva inhabit. From all my observations and interactions with the devotees, it was clear that the 'images' of the gods Meenakshi and Sundaresvara were not merely images. Rather as the *agamic* ritual texts construe it, and the devotees perceive it, the image is a manifestation of the God after it is infused with the spirit of the God though ritual.

One would naturally be led to assume that because the male god was deemed by the *tala puranic* text to be the primary deity, the devotees would seek out Sundaresvara-Siva over and above that of the goddess. However, my informants would often point out that on the occasions when they were rushed, or during the season of pilgrimage when the traffic at the temple was even denser than is usual, they would leave even before visiting the shrine of Siva. But they were emphatic that they would not leave without offering worship at the shrine of the goddess. In a survey conducted some twenty years ago it was estimated that the daily visitors to the temple, on average numbered fifteen thousand and on Fridays, a day sacred to the goddess, a staggering twenty five thousand![9]

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[8] Sewell Robert, *Madurai on the Verge of Change: Western Sources for the Early Nineteenth Century*, Madras: Munshilal Manoharlal, 1977, 17.

[9] Fuller C. J., *The Divine Couple's Relationship in a South Indian Temple*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, 171.

3. Moment: Gender, Feminism and the Hindu Goddess Meenakshi

Standing amongst the many other devotees I was in awe of the goddess Meenakshi as she stood in her inner sanctum in classical goddess pose. Her image, sculpted in black stone was strikingly arresting. She was regal looking and had what are considered to be beautiful almond shaped eyes. The eyes that greeted the devotee were large and distinctive. As her name, *Meen-akshi* suggests, she was very much the fish-eyed goddess. The gold covered body showed her to be resplendently decked in the ritual paraphernalia befitting a goddess. A colourful silk *sari* was carefully draped around the slender waist. From the finely chiselled face glittered a large diamond nose-ring. Her face was framed by heavy earrings and around the ankles were the traditional *golisu* (ankles), on the toes the *mitti* (rings). Her image and the embedded mythology of her 'birth' are richly evocative, for both the devotee as well as the student of religion.

Catherine Bell claims that ritual acts are articulated and are to be understood within a semantic framework. She tells us that the significant of the act depends on where it is articulated, and the context of all other ways of acting, that is to say, "what it echoes, what it inverts, what it alludes to, what it denies."[10] If one has to extend this to the articulation and the sequential ordering of the daily public worship to the gods in the Meenakshi temple we see that it can facilitate a heuristic interpretation of the theological import of these deities. The order of worship between the two main deities is itself simple and something that I was able to observe over the many weeks of doing fieldwork there. The daily ritual public worship is *first offered to Meenakshi* and *thereafter to Siva or Sundaresvara.*

It made sense for the Meenakshi devotees at Madurai to offer worship at the goddess shrine before proceeding to Siva's shrine. To the devotees this behaviour mirrored the fact that all rituals were themselves offered to the goddesses first. The rather charismatic temple head musician Ponusami Pillai revealed to me that although the exact time varied, usually all rituals to the goddess (accompanied by full complement and religious fanfare of temple musicians), were offered approximately fifteen to thirty minutes before being offered to Siva. He did add though, that there were times when the second priest (at the Siva shrine) began to offer worship before the worship to the goddess had been fully completed. All this was confirmed in a subsequent interview with the temple priest.

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[10] Bell Catherine, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, 220.

Another informant Gnana Sastrigal rightly pointed out that in all the other major Saiva temples in south India, ritual was always offered first to Siva and only thereafter to the goddess. This point was borne out by another participant, this time a young scholar by the name of Sankarasastri who also maintained that as far as the Saiva *agamic* texts are concerned, ritual was prescribed to be performed first to the male god and only thereafter to the female goddess. He too stated that for the order of worship to be any other way at Meenakshi Temple meant that the order had been somehow inverted. Thus what had come to be standardised was the inverse[11] of this *agamic* prescription. This inversion fascinated me.

Now this is different from offering worship first, to say a deity like Ganesha. Ganesha is constructed in both textual and popular religious imagination as the remover of obstacles and first ritual offering to him makes sense at that level. It is not any kind of inversion that is perceived here. And Ganesha is not deemed as more important ontologically speaking because of offering ritual and worship to him first. No more so than offering ritual to the gate-keeping Munisvar, before proceeding to the shrine of the goddess would have us construe Munisvar as the theologically superior. He is rather the gate-keeper deity. However, the ritual order at the Meenakshi temple *does have* theological import for the simple reason that *it is an inversion within the context of the Saiva agamic prescriptions for temple ritual worship.* While the inversion may have been politically motivated, it comes to be understood (in popular consciousness, by the devotee) as having theological significance. And it becomes significant for a discussion on gender and religion. Tirumala Nayak may not have had gender and feminist concerns on his mind (if indeed he was responsible for the inversion of the ritual order) however, the change that he initiated comes to have implications for the feminist cause of gendering a vital aspect of worship in a Hindu context.

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[11] There is a small body of oral testimony that suggests that Tirumala Nayaka was responsible for inverting the order of the public worship to the deities, Meenakshi and Sundaresvara. What emerges from a few scarce literary sources was that Tirumala Nayaka in the thirteenth century, who was a Vaishnavite, that is a worshiper of the god Vishnu rather than Siva, was also a strong follower of Mother power goddess worship. One suggests then that it is very possible that it was during this period that the original order (as would have been prescribed by the Saiva *agama* texts) of performing the *puja* at the Sundersvara shrine first, was altered to afford the mother goddess a more prestigious place, thereby affording her the ritual prerogative to grant the first *darshan* to the devotees. And interestingly, although we come across the name Cokkar, Somasundera, etc., well established in the literary works during the Nayak period (1600- 2750 BCE), the name Meenakshi Temple, although not found in the literary tradition, is used in popular tradition from the days of the Nayak rulers (Kramrisch Stella, *The Hindu Temple*, vols. 1 and 2. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976.)

The inversion was also reflected in popular sociological terms. A common colloquial that has been documented by scholars like William Harman, and which I came across personally in my own interviews, was the expression '*who wears the pants in the family.*' This was a reference to the question as to which of the spousal figures, the male or the female held dominance in that particular family. It was also a popular reference to the fact that in terms of the locally understood theology of the gods, Meenakshi was understood in some respects, as being more powerful than Siva. Of course Siva was revered and worshipped, but it was clear that the devotees at Madurai felt that the goddess Meenakshi took a personal interest in their welfare and was more powerfully connected to them.

Of greater interest was also the fact that many women alluded to the goddess in their discussion of more egalitarian sharing of power and decision making in their households. Even many older and traditionally inclined female informants shared that "*amman* was a good example to them, and gave them the power to be strong women in their own home." One woman shared that in "no other place is the goddess given the honour of worship first... in an *amman* temple yes... but this is a Saiva temple... yet it is Meenakshi first..." These kind of statements are anecdotal markers to how the theological importance of the goddess comes to be construed. It underscores manner in which the Madurai devotees view their goddess, as the primary divinity in their lives and inverts the (textual) superiority of the male god. If we had to apply the argument that relations of power are rarely engendered from only the top down, but from the bottom up as well[12] to the Madurai devotees, it is clear that ritual behaviour is not only structured from the top, by the texts and Brahmin specialists, but also engendered by the devotees themselves. The devotees seek out the *darshan* of Sundaresvara-Siva, but only after they have had the sight of the goddess Meenakshi. She has been granted the prerogative, not shared by the other main female deities in other Saiva temples, to have the devotee look upon the goddess first, and to offer the first *darshan.*

There are two reasons that one is able to adduce for the relative importance of the goddess over the god, in terms of ritual dominance as well as theological import. The first is the devotees' attitude towards the goddess which alludes to certain features of the goddess' personality, who if we accept as an ancient goddess from the local Madurai folk tradition, appears deeply embedded in the religious consciousness of the devotees. Alongside the obvious reverence felt towards the goddess (seen as the mother who takes care of her children, epitomised by the devotees) it is the strong element of fear that the goddess must not be transgressed. My informants were all emphatic that they would not leave the temple without having received the *darshan* (sight) of Meenakshi.

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[12] Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 201.

The second point refers to the ordering of the public worship offered to the two main deities in the Meenakshi Temple, which reinforces the primacy and centrality of the goddess in the existential welfare of the Madurai devotees. All daily *pujas* from four thirty in the morning, from the *tiruvanantal puja* (waking up the deity) to the *palliyarai puja* (putting the deity to bed) at nine thirty in the night is first offered to the goddess housed in the inner shrine, before being offered to Siva. While the former is a reflection of the devotees' religious feeling towards the goddess, the latter can be suggested as a result of a political strategy on the part of the ruling Nayaks of the thirteenth century.

In the final analysis, the reality is that while the *Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam* constructs the perception that the space belongs to Siva, the devotees understand that as presiding deity of Madurai, the city is under the control of the goddess. This paradox between the goddess' textual status and the way she is understood by her lay[13] worshippers suggests points to the possibility of older and popular elements of the goddess that predate the Madurai marriage myth in the *tala Purana*.

4. Women and Religion Studies: Engaging with Autoethnography

My zeal to study religion or rather gender and religion was shaped in part by me having a clutch of experiences as a woman. It was also shaped very decisively by my early travels through India. On the two occasions that I had travelled for three months across the North and South Indian states of India, I was struck by how incredibly easily it was on some levels to be welcomed into the home and intimate family spaces of many people. I was equally struck by how incredibly difficult it was to travel in my nomadic state-hopping style as single female from city to city across India. I encountered, and experienced firsthand the abyss between how women were conceived in religious terms and how they were construed and constructed in cultural and popular terms. In a land of people who revered the female as Feminine Divine, existed also very parochial and damaging perceptions of women, in terms of what her worth and character might be, especially if she had chosen to travel alone.

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[13] I use the term 'lay' to differentiate between the temple-going devotees and the ritual specialists or priests who are also devotees.

All of this prompted, in the third trip which was the research trip, a methodological strategy of dressing in a *sari* or *churidar* to resemble a local. It also saw me taking a conscious decision not to socialise with the many backpacking male and female travellers that passed through the city. I had been very harshly treated and chastised for what had been construed as 'low morals' for socialising with loose morale 'white' European women travellers. The widely pervasive perception about these white female travellers (and of myself by default) was that we must necessarily be women of little or no morals, who would take up an unsavoury alliance with one or more of the local men. I found that no matter how respectfully the female travellers or I dressed and behaved, we always had to stave off really crude misogynist comments and approaches. There appeared to a massive disjunct between how women (as goddesses) were constructed in textual sources and how women were constructed in popular social interactions. I ascribed much of this behaviour to the fact that women (after a certain age) were thought of as needing to be married. The single Indian female was considered as *deviating* from the normative cultural imperative of marriage, while the single foreign female was considered as *deviant*. This was more so because she was travelling alone and was constructed as being perpetually sexually available (thus not wanting or needing a male chaperone). While this perception of sexual availability may not have been shared by the families that I encountered and shared time with, it was a perception that most males whom I encountered (at my lodge etc.) seemed to have. And while many of the welcoming and caring families I befriended did not think me morally wayward, they did pity my unmarried state: '*Kalyanam yoonama agilai*' or '*not yet married*' was something I rapidly grew very accustomed to hearing.

This disjunct, that made itself visible at the level of the popular, in fact underscored that in numerous instances, many aspects of the rich and diverse religion of Hinduism was interpreted in very parochial and patriarchal ways that obligated particular normative appearances and hegemonic codes of behaviour for women. Thus, the goddess Meenakshi at the Madurai Meenakshi Temple, her rich mythological history as warrior-goddess, and her ritual prerogative of offering the first *darshan* to devotees, provided rich opportunity for textual and ethnographic scrutiny.

According to the *puranic* tradition the goddess is said to have been born with three breasts from a sacrificial fire. Meenakshi's birth is traced to the myth informing us that queen Kanchanamala and king Malayadvaja Pandyan, the son of Kulecekara Pandyan, find that they are unable to have a child and undertake (with the advice of Indra) the performance of the Vedic injunctive sacrifices prescribed for a male child. The child born (as a three year old) visibly thwarts the need for a male heir and is instead the female *Tatakai*, who grows into the three breasted Meenakshi. Much has been written by scholars like Dennis Hudson as to how the third breast can be likened to a phallic symbol of sorts. Whatever we may make of this suggestion, there is no escaping the possibility inherent in the way the mythological texts speak of the goddess, that there are androgynous overtones to Meenakshi. I have written elsewhere[14] of how this notion of androgyny can be interpreted through queer theory as blurring the lines between normatively constructed male and female genders with the possibility of the goddess being a example of 'fuzzy gender.'

It was clear from one of the groups that I interviewed regarding the dominance of the respective gods that the religious community of Madurai, Saiva as well as Vaishnava, saw the goddess Meenakshi as responsible for every facet of their well being. As such she was also perceived to be responsible for any misfortune that might befall them, in which case special propitiation to her was required to reverse the tide of events. The fear that this goddess elicited, together with the reverence and awe the devotee felt toward her, appeared to connect her with the (more capricious) village goddesses who were at once responsible for averting major calamity as well as bringing it on, both in the life of the 'devotee,' as well as for the village as a whole.

Most religious establishments, authored texts and rituals in the context of Indian society, values even, are sponsored and managed by males. It thus becomes easier to understand why it is that, in religious texts, the power structure between male and female throughout the corpus of *Brahmanic* as opposed to folk mythology is almost always unequally balanced in the favour of the male.[15]

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[14] See Naidu, Maheshvari, "Inscribing the Female Body: Fuzzy Gender and Goddess in a South Indian Saiva Myth, Journal of Religion Southern Africa, 2008, vol. 21. 1, 19-36.

[15] See Sharma P., *Woman in Hindu Literature*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1995, 56 and O' Flaherty Wendy Doniger, *Tales of Sex and Violence*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981, 77.

Additionally it is revealing that when a Dravidian goddess marries into the Sanskritic *Brahmanic* tradition, she is said to retain a separate shrine for herself. This appears to be the pattern in Saiva temples. A few of my informants, who were traditionally trained scholars and appeared to be die-hard Siva supporters, maintained that the goddess shrine was a much later addition to the temple. However the original mythic narrative in the *tala puranic* tells us that Kulecekara Pandyan ordered that two shrines be built and that one would be for the goddess.

While temporal privileging does not necessarily mean ontological dominance, I feel that in this context it does point very suggestively to theological dominance. This is for the simple and telling reason that image worship is what the *agamic temple tradition* is all about. The worship of a deity in an image is the central ritual concern of the *agamic* literature[16] and this is very much the vein in which the "ritual actors"[17] come to understand worship offered to the image housed in a temple. At the centre of (most) temples in the *garbhagrha* or womb house within which the god is said to reside and which is a small dark space that is enclosed on all three sites by the walls of the shrine. And the image, especially the image in the *garbhagrha* to which worship and rituals are offered is especially powerful as it is supposed to house the concentrated presence of the main deity. It thus follows, I believe that order of the ritual to the powerful concentrated presence of the gods in the inner sanctum, is of significant importance. While none of the changes in ritual order were an intentional gendering of the religion, yet that is how it has come to be experienced at the popular level. This is the point that I make. Privileging the goddess with the ritual order may have been politically motivated, but the reverberations of that act can well be refracted in gendered terms, for the simple and salient reason, that this is how the devotees experience it. And the ritual order is first to Meenakshi, the goddess with 'male-like' warrior ancestrage and elements of the 'masculine-like' and powerful folk goddess, what I refer to as a 'fuzzy' goddess.

The notion of 'fuzzy,' I believe, offers liberatory possibilities within patriarchal religions. Given her mixed ancestry and her connection to indigenous folk goddesses, the goddess Meenakshi can be seen as occupying a grey area or a fuzzy space. While born with an extra breast, a signifier of 'being female,' she lives and is raised plastically, outside of the prevailing cultural mores prescribing the behaviour for a female. She is raised, according to the *puranic* mythology, as a male. The extra breast in this context does not translate to her being, *even more female*, but rather, *more male*. This "female masculinity" or "feminine masculinity" can perhaps be construed in the "articulation of a third sex, the category of inversion" that opens "up a terrain for imagining both 'feminine men' and 'female masculinities.'"[18] I quite like the possibility of construing the goddess as an inversion of the sexes and as occupying a space of fuzzy gender as this was echoed by the way both male, and even more so, female devotees perceived the goddess, as she was *prior* to her marriage (as warrior-princess *Tatakai*). The Hindu women I interviewed spoke proudly of the goddess' exploits. While they did not overtly appear to perceive her as male, or even in any sense androgynous, their narrative of her was constantly punctuated with, "just like a man," "courageous like a man." Not male, but just *like* a male.

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[16] Surdam Wayne, "The Vedicization of Saiva Ritual," in S. S. Janali, ed., *Siva Temple and Temple Ritual*, Madras: Kuppusami Sastri Res. Institute, 1988, 54.

[17] Humphrey, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual*, 1994, 97.

Meenakshi, as an example of fuzzy gender, offers a challenge to "historical signatures"[19] of male-embodiment and female-embodiment and an androcentric understanding of labour that harks all the way back to man the hunter in opposition to woman the gatherer and reproducer. "Fuzzy" as a conceptual tool is traceable to Buddhist philosophic notions of fuzzy logic and the Hindu and Buddhist matrix of non-dualism, and as such is not completely foreign to the Indian subcontinent and Hinduism.

5. Conclusion

As the introductory paragraphs spell out, much of this paper was in the style of sharing autobiographic experiences and observances leading up to, and lived in the research space. I find that the methodological tool of autoethnography lends itself to sharing emic experiences with the reader, where the reader is allowed to in part, *journey* with the writer. Granted this methodology would not lend itself to all disciplinary frameworks. It would make less intellectual sense for research work in the Natural sciences. However, it is felt that for work in the Humanities and Social sciences, and especially work in anthropology and feminism, it is most apposite. Autoethnography as a methodology is of course not only available to women or feminists (and some feminists are indeed male activists or scholars). However, being a woman and feminist researcher allowed me to not only search out the women amongst the general community of Siva and Meenakshi devotees, and ask questions and listen to their stories, more importantly it allowed the women to confide sentiments that they would not normally have shared with male researchers. It is a well known fact that the early benchmark theorists, the likes of Bronislaw Malinosksi and AR Radcliffe-Brown, although providing us with rich ethnographies of the communities they studied, wrote as if the women were largely muted and invisible. Much of their questions were directed to the males and answers heard from the males. It was later feminist theorists in anthropology, the female anthropologists like Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere[20] who showed that much of the early ethnographic material carried a heavy gender bias in favour of the male. Likewise when scholars like C. J. Fuller and William Harman[21]worked with the priests at the Madurai Meenakshi Temple they worked almost exclusively with the male priests and devotees of the temple. This was of course very possibly because of the social protocol in the average Indian home of the times, where the senior male members of the family would interact with outsiders, especially foreign male outsiders. Thus, while my 'Indian-ness' and 'Hindu-ness' were variables that helped broker a relationship with the women, my female gender was what further cemented initial rapport and subsequent trust with them. All of this has more to do with being a female research, than being a feminist or using autoethnography. However, I would suggest that it is the use of autoethnography I believe, that allows the reader to get 'to know' both the researcher and research participant. Female researchers are further able to share, through autoethnography, how their experiences as women have allowed them to broker special kinds of research relationships with the women in their study.

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[18] Breger Claudia, "Feminine, Masculinities: Scientific and Literary Representations of 'Female Inversion' at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 14, 2005, 76-106, 76.

[19] Tauchert Ashley, "Fuzzy Gender: Between Female-Embodiment and Intersex," *Journal of Gender Studies*, 11.1, 2002, 29-38, 32.

Anthropological work is cognisant of the postmodern recognition of the author as an integral part of the research work. Feminist studies and feminist ethnographies have also long been open to alternate modes of inquiry and enquiring and alternate modes of communicating that enquiry to an audience. Feminist writers have used poetry and performance, as well as art as viable academic forums that are able to communicate on multiple levels of the emotional as well as cognitive and intellectual levels. It is within feminist scholarship that we are able to interrogate the personal (constructed) realities that women are made to perform within religious norms and ritual. Much of the performance of female gender scripts appear to be drawn from the regulatory power of certain (male-centred) canonized religious texts, themselves authored by male religious custodians. As females we are the canvas upon which these scripts come to be enacted. Autoethnographic modes within feminist studies and feministic perspectives in religion studies allows us the space to connect the experiential (our stories) to the theory and paves the way for both theoretical and concrete deconstruction of hegemonic normatives.

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[20] See Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, ed., *Woman, Culture, and Society*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974.

[21] Fuller C. J., *Servants of the Goddess*: *The Priest of a South Indian Temple,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984 and Harman William, *The Sacred Marriage of a Hindu Goddess*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Autoethnography is "an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural."[22] Ellis and Bochner put forward that autoethnography as "a form of writing that turns the researcher's own experience into a topic of investigation in its own right."[23] To me, autoethnography is an example of methodological innovation that allows us to be candid about our involvement in the research process. It is not so much about privileging ourselves over and above those we are studying, or subsuming and muting the participants' voices, but more about a methodological awareness that ethnography is embodied practice, and that as researchers we hold great representational authority and responsibility. 'Coming clean' or being honest about this point, and bringing it under scholarly scrutiny, rescues us from solipsism, or narcissism and prompts us to be reflexively analytic.

Reed-Danahay[24] explains that autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on *graphy* (i.e., the research process), *ethnos* (i.e., culture), or *auto* (i.e., self). This is what I have attempted in this paper. Whatever the specific focus, as authors we use our own cultural experiences reflexively, to look more deeply at self-other interactions. By writing ourselves into our own work as characters, autoethnographers challenge accepted views about silent authorship. There is always the balancing act of giving voice to ourselves as well as to our research participants. Autoethnographic methodology's success as a qualitative tool lies in the convergence of the "autobiographic impulse" and the "ethnographic moment." Autoethnographic methodology makes us acutely conscious of how we "witness" our own reality constructions. Amanda Coffey in her article 'The Place of the Personal in Qualitative Research'[25] tells us that researchers are in any event concerned with "observing, narrating and writing lives and experiences, and as such act as biographers of sorts." She asserts that one should be aware that qualitative research, in its purest form, "is experienced by and embodied through the researchers themselves."[26]

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[22] Ellis C. and Bochner A., "Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject," in Denzin N. & Lincoln Y. eds., *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 2000, 739, 733-768.

[23] Ellis and Bochner, "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity," 739.

[24] Coffey, "The Place of the Personal in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Researcher*, 4, 2007, 1.

This paper has not been so much about the specific *research findings*, which I have addressed in other papers, how Madurai comes to be constructed as sacred space,[27] the ritual imperative of marriage and what marriage does to the goddess,[28] the goddess as having local indigenous roots.[29] Instead the point of this paper was primarily to probe the use of autoethnography as a tool in communicating more intimately the *research process* in the context of gender and religion. Within this brief I have sought to highlight (*using autoethnographic material*) certain aspects of ritual and worship at the Meenakshi temple that can be looked at within a feminist and gendered theory.

In typical autoethnographic style, I will close with a narrative that perhaps better explains the unpredictable research process. I had prefaced my stay in Madurai with a short stopover in Madras, meant to allow me time to visit the libraries of the University of Madras. In Madras I met several people who were intrigued by a student from South Africa who wished to, as they put it, study their religion, while all their students were aspiring towards studies in the sciences. Many of them were incredibly helpful. I remember clearly one particular elderly lady who offered to contact her relatives in Madurai so that I could be accommodated with family during my stay in the city. Her good Samaritan efforts did not actually come to fruit as I was compelled to decline the offer. Although excited by the prospect of living in a traditional Indian village I also wanted to be as proximate to the main temple as possible. I thus felt that living with her family on the distant outskirt of Madurai would have complicated daily travel arrangements to the city centre.

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[25] Coffey, "The Place of the Personal in Qualitative Research," 1.

[26] Coffey, "The place of the Personal in Qualitative Research," 3.

[27] Naidu Maheshvari, "Business Suits and Priests: Power and Priesthood," *Nidan: International Journal for Hinduism*, vol. 14, 2004, 2-18.

[28] Naidu Maheshvari, "Ritual Space and Ritual Dominance: The Goddess Meenakshi," *Nidan: International Journal for Hinduism*, vol. 12. 1, 2002, 12-28.

[29] Naidu Maheshvari, "Inscribing the Female Body: Fuzzy Gender and Goddess in a South Indian Saiva Myth," *Journal of Religion Southern Africa*, vol. 21. 1, 2008, 19-36.

I was nevertheless naturally grateful to her kind efforts thanked her. She returned my words with a smile and said: "Never mind, Meenakshi (referring to the goddess) will take care of you my child." I had forgotten this remark and probably would have not paid it too much attention. Certainly I did not expect the goddess to meet and escort me from the train station. Later that week, on the train to Madurai I was fortunate enough to befriend a young student from Madras who had overheard my conversation with the conductor. Hearing that I was a student from South Africa he assured me that although he did not live in Madurai, his female cousin who was meeting him did, and that '*she would take care of me.*' You could well image my bemused surprise when I was introduced to the cousin waiting patiently on the platform. *Her name was Meenakshi.*

She apparently visited the temple as often as she could. Meenakshi was to be an invaluable companion and guide over the next three months, helping to orient me to the city. She even helped as we drove in search of suitable accommodation, negotiating our path through the dense traffic that is an audible greeting to any foreigner. Meenakshi's helpful presence was a vindication of the words of the conductor earlier in this research story. The city limits were certainly the entrance into some kind of religious space.

In a city where the goddess is known as Meenakshi it is of course no surprise that there would be many named in her honour. The name of the goddess was considered so auspicious that I found it graced stores and buildings, even rickshaws(!). There is thus no allusion to anything supernatural about my meeting, but to the more mundane, completely unpredictable reality of fieldwork. Fieldwork is at times downright frustrating. Quite often it frankly fails to live up to the rather romantic notions one carries around. When everything is said and done there is much about fieldwork that simply translates to 'being there at the right time,' or 'making contact with the right person.' There are however, those beautiful 'encounters' that leave warm memories of the research process, little reminders of the sheer chance of it all as we search for answers.

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GENDER INEQUALITY AND THE SCOURGE OF HIV/AIDS

The Bahai Religio-Philosophical Solution

Don Akhilomen and Idjakpo Onos Godwin◆

1. Introduction

One of the most complex challenges facing contemporary Africa is how to resolve the frightening health crises, especially that posed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. With the continent hosting about 70% of the world's total population of infected people, HIV/AIDS is correctly to be described as African holocaust.[1] The very high incidence of HIV/AIDS in Africa, and the even more worrying overwhelming preponderance of female infection, rightly provokes the thinking that there is a gender dimension to the HIV/AIDS scourge in the sub-Saharan continent of Africa.

In this essay, we shall be examining the character of the HIV/AIDS infection and its effects within the socio-cultural praxis of gender inequality in Africa. Adopting the empirical, expository and analytical methodologies, this paper seeks to establish that gender inequality is a core factor in explaining and understating the character of HIV/AIDS infection and the care of the affected in Africa. By means of the hermeneutical method, it is suggested that the adoption of the egalitarian principles and teachings advocated in the Bahai religion will greatly help in appropriately addressing and solving the complex challenges posed by HIV/AIDS through the resolution of the social and cultural problem of gender inequality in Africa.

2. Bahai Religion

Founded in the late 19th century as the successor to Babism, the "Bahai" religion derived its name from Arabic, meaning, "Glorious." Its founder, whose birth name was Mirza Husain Ali (1817-1892), saw himself as the fulfilment of the prophecy of the Bab (meaning in Arabic, "the Gate"), the prophet of Babism. On instituting the Babi religion in 1844, the Bab foretold the future appearance, 19 years after, of a divine personality

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◆**Dr. Don Akhilomen** is a Professor of Religious Management and Cultural Studies, at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma and **Dr. Idjakpo Onos Godwin** is a Senior lecturer in the Department of Philosophy, in the same University.

[1] A. Adogame, "Announcement of the IAHR Regional Conference and Third AASR Conference in Africa", 2007. http://www.a-asr.org Retrieved on the 10/2/2009.

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"whom God would make manifest."[2] Mirza Husain Ali, who was born in Persia, was one of the followers of the Bab.[3]

After the Bab's martyrdom in 1850, Mirza Husain Ali adopted the name "Baha Allah" (which means in Arabic, "the splendour of God") and became the leader of one of several Babi factions. In 1852, the Persian government, in line with its official policy of persecuting Babis, massacred some 20,000 of the Bab's followers; in the course of which, Baha Allah, together with his family, and some of his own followers were spared from death. He was however imprisoned, tortured and finally expelled to Baghdad, from where he and his followers were also subsequently forced to migrate to Istanbul in Turkey, and finally to a penal colony in Akko in Palestine (now Israel), where he remained till his death. While in Baghdad, in 1863, Baha Allah declared he was the manifestation of the divine figure whom the Bab had foretold 19 years earlier (in 1844). His followers, now known as Bahais, believe that he was the latest in a series of divine manifestations that include Zoroaster, the Buddha, Jesus Christ, and Muhammad. They also believe that he brought a new revelation to the world.[4]

Baha Allah strove to establish a universal religion and philosophy, which calls for moral and social compensation of the underprivileged, were chiefly disseminated by his eldest son, Abbas-later known as Abd al-Baha (meaning in Arabic, "the servant of the Glory"). Abd al-Baha was imprisoned for years, like his father before him. He was subsequently freed, and travelled to Europe and North America to spread his father's teachings. He summed up the Bahai faith in a creed that included among its aims: the promotion of racial and religious harmony; the equality of the sexes; an international auxiliary language; a universal education; a universal faith based on the essence of the great religions; and, a universal representative government.[5] The writings of the Bab, Baha Allah, and Abd al-Baba constitute the sacred literature of the Bahai religion, which has no other institutional authority. The movement lacks both priesthood and ritual. In his will, Abd al-Baha designated his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (1897-1957), a graduate of Harvard University, as the guardian of the Faith.

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[2] Abdul Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1990, XI.

[3] "Bahai", *Microsoft Encarta Reference Library*, 2002.

[4] Abdul Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, ix-xiii.

[5] "Bahai," *Microsoft Encarta Reference* Library, 2002. See also http://religionsmovements.lib.virginia.edu, Retrieved on the 7/6/2007.

Though Bahaism originally arose in Persia, not later than 1920, it had built up its greatest following in the United States. Under the direction of Shoghi Efendi, the US Bahais developed an administrative system with headquarters in Wilmette, Illinois. Wherever nine or more Bahais reside, a "spiritual assembly" may be formed. Bahaism has adherents in more than 300 countries including some countries in Africa. The Bahai faith was first declared in Africa in 1921 in the northern part of the continent.[6] From the second half of the 20th century, the religion began to reach other parts of the African continent with a number of Africans becoming followers of the Bahai faith that has "its headquarters for Africa in Kampala, Uganda where there is a large temple built on a hill."[7] With over five million followers residing in almost every nation on earth, the Bahai religion surpasses some religions in its geographic spread.[8] The movement has its world headquarters in Israel, on the slopes of Mount Carmel overlooking Haifa and Akko, where a shrine of the Bab, an archive and an administrative centre are located.[9]

3. Gender Inequality

Gender inequality or gender discrimination has become a sad and unfortunate part of human history. Regrettably, this has been the case from the earliest beginnings.[10] *The Black's Law Dictionary* has defined discrimination as "Differential treatment; especially, a failure to treat all persons equally when no reasonable distinction can be found between those favored and those not favored."[11] In the same vein, gender or sex discrimination has been defined as the "Discrimination based on gender, especially against women."[12] Sadly, male chauvinism seems to have nourished, on a global scale, the discrimination against women at the cultural, legal, social, political and religious levels. This is especially true of Africa, where there are many forms of gender discrimination, reinforced by stereotypes, culture, traditions and religious beliefs.

In view of the negative effects of gender discrimination on human development, especially on the part of women, the past thirty years has witnessed a number of agitations for gender equality by human right institutions and the feminist movement. The effect of the women liberation movement and the human right struggles has been a greater awareness of the evils of gender discrimination, culminating in the recognition and declaration of women's right as human right by the International Covenants on Human Rights and the conventions of the United Nation's Commission on the Status of Woman. In harmony with the demands of the traditional liberal feminists, the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, in September, 1995 decided to set out an Agenda for Equality.[13]

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[6] J. S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, London: Heinemann, 1977, 188.

[7] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 188.

[8] http://religionsmovements.lib.virginia.edu, Retrieved on the 7/6/2007.

[9] "Bahai" in *Microsoft Encarta Reference Library*, 2002.

[10] Alan Wolfe, "The Gender Question," *The New Republic*, June 6, 2007, 27-34.

[11] B.A. Garner, *Blacks' Law Dictionary*, St. Paul, Minn: West Group, 1999, 479.

[12] Garner, *Blacks' Law Dictionary*, 480.

4. HIV/AIDS

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a member of the Retroviridae family of viruses, commonly known as retroviruses and classified in the subfamily, lentiviruses. HIV was isolated in 1983 almost simultaneously by three groups of scientist: Luc Montagnier's group at the Pasteur Institute in Paris, Robert Gallo's group at the National Cancer Institute, and a group headed by Jay Levy at the University of California, San Francisco. A result of human infection with HIV is the complex clinical disease known as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS); a condition which may take ten or more years to develop. It is "a clinical syndrome (a group of various illnesses that together characterize a disease) resulting from damage to the immune system caused by infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)."[14]

The origin of HIV in human beings is extensively claimed to have resulted from cross-species transfer of a Simian Immunodeficiency Virus (SIV) from the chimpanzee, *Pan Troglodytes troglodyte*, in central Africa, probably centuries ago.[15] Two main types of HIV have been identified. These are known as HIV-1 and HIV -2. HIV-1 is said to be responsible for the majority of infections in the West, (Europe and American) while both HIV-1 and HIV-2 are prevalent in Africa. HIV-2 is associated with a less aggressive disease course than HIV-1. HIV -1 has been further classified into several subtypes, known as "clades," whose geographical distribution varies from country to country.

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[13] There were three major United Nations' Conferences held (in 1975, 1980 and 1985) prior to the one in Beijing, China in 1995; the latter "centered on human rights issues relating specifically to women." See "Women's Movement" in *Microsoft Encarta Reference Library*, 2002.

[14] "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome" in *Microsoft Encarta Reference Library*, 2002.

[15] "Human Immunodeficiency Virus" in *Microsoft Encarta Reference Library*, 2002.

In individuals infected by HIV, there is a gradual loss of immune cells (call CD4 + T-lymphocytes) and a resultant declining immune function. "The loss of immune function, if untreated, results eventually in the development of opportunistic diseases caused by common infections that do not present a threat to healthy individuals, including fungal, bacterial, protozoal, and viral diseases, as well as by malignancies that appear to be associated with immune dysregulation."[16] Death from AIDS is generally not due to HIV infection itself, but due to opportunistic conditions following the appearance of any one of more than twenty different opportunistic infection and malignancies, termed AIDS defining illnesses, which provides the clinical diagnosis of AIDS in HIV-infected individuals.

5. Gender Inequality as a Factor in HIV/AIDS Incidence in Africa

The epidemic proportion of HIV/AIDS infection in Africa, no doubt, justifies a rationalization of the ugly phenomenal which has made the continent to be stereotyped as, "the cradle of disease and death."[17] With about 30 million of the total world figure of 40 million infected people claimed to be living in Africa, the need to comprehensively locate the factors that can possibly explain the African peculiarity and vulnerability becomes very urgent and imperative. Out of the roughly 30 million infected people in Africa, it is believed that about 20 million, representing 75% are of the female gender. The gender bias of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa becomes more worrisome when it is further realized that the burden of the care of those infected and affected by the disease in Africa, largely lies on the shoulders of the females; either as mothers, aunties, wives, sisters or nurses.

The above reality of the gender character of HIV/AIDS infection and its effects in Africa, evidently underscores the thinking, which this paper now seeks to establish, that gender inequality is a fundamental factor in HIV/AIDS incidence in the continent. The role of gender inequality in the very high incidence of HIV/AIDS infection in Africa will be examined further from the educational, cultural, economic and social perspectives.

6. Educational Inequality

In pre-independent Africa societies, there was a very high degree of gender inequality in the area of formal education. Even up to the present time, this educational inequality against the female child evidently persists in African societies, in several guises. To the majority of Africans, the woman's place is in the kitchen. Hence, it is commonly assumed that African families, majority of which are already impoverished, need not have the added burden of educating girl children, as they will most likely end up being domesticated in the homes of their future husbands. Considering the cost of education and the poor economic fortunes of the majority of Africans, educating a girl child is therefore erroneously considered a wasteful and unreasonable investment.

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[16] "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome" in *Microsoft Encarta Reference Library*, 2002.

[17] Adogame, "Announcement of the IAHR Regional Conference."

Even in cases where the values of educating the females have been fairly realized, patriarchal considerations tend to influence the discrimination against the woman concerning the courses to study. In this respect, women are often assumed to be unfit to study professional courses that are likely to give them some level of independence and enhance their economic wellbeing. This explains why it is assumed that women should study courses in education (teaching), nursing, catering, etc., rather than studying engineering, law, or medicine. In such circumstances, for example, women who study law are presumed to be likely to be less submissive and more troublesome in marriage; the ones who study engineering are thought to be very likely to be too involved with men and masculine activities; while the female doctors are condemned for the possibility of having physical access and contact with other men in the course of their professional practice, and these are strangely considered in most Africa communities as immoral.

Part of the consequences of the poor and unwilling attitude of Africans to educate the female children is the high degree of ignorance which is to be found among the vast majority of women in the continent. This level of ignorance, directly and negatively impact on the high incidence of HIV/AIDS infection in Africa. This ignorance manifests in several dimensions which includes: the lack of knowledge of basic hygiene; the ignorance of the universal methods of transmission of HIV and the causes of AIDS; the accommodation of many unhealthy beliefs and practices informed by ignorance, which tends to promote the spread of HIV/AIDS infection in the continent. Among the latter is the entering of lovers into blood covenant to secure love relationships; thereby exposing more people to unscreened blood which is one of the ways of transmitting the virus. In most cases, this practice is cherished by women who are desperate to get hooked to a man as a possible wife in a society which does not value a woman for her intrinsic worth but more for her marital status.

Other beliefs and practices stemming from ignorance and distorted orientation, which possibly account for the high incidence of HIV infections in Africa include the belief that AIDS is not real but an "American Invention to Discourage Sex"; that sexual intercourse with a man who uses condom rubs the act of pleasure; that insisting on the use of condom by a woman signals the lack of love for the man or that the woman is too spoilt; and that the hindered reception by the woman of ejaculated sperm in a protected sexual intercourse denies her of vital nutrients essential for the bodily vitality and hair growth. From the above, it is perhaps much more convincing that the poor educational exposure of the majority of people in Africa, especially the women, who are more disadvantaged because of the combination of poverty (which causes the inability of parents to educate both the male of female children, equally) and patriarchy, account for the very high incidence of HIV/AIDS in the continent.

7. Economic Inequality

Economically, the female gender in Africa is largely known to be disempowered.[18] From the traditional till the present day society, this attitude seems to have been consistent. For example, in the predominantly agrarian traditional societies, women were encouraged to cultivate the subsistent, consumable crops rather than the essential cash crops; thereby economically disempowering them. Today, in most African societies, patriarchy has also inspired the attitude of not encouraging women to meaningfully engage in serious commercial, political or professional career activities, by tacitly stigmatizing women who engage in these highly economically promising ventures, as loose women of easy virtue. In some African societies, there are even some traditional and cultural restrictions and discriminations concerning the right of ownership of the core productive factor of land in the community. In such societies, like those in South East of Nigeria, women are not allowed to own, inherit or sell land, by themselves.

Hence, one of the many sad consequences of poor education, patriarchy, male chauvinism and sometimes misogyny, is the economic impoverishment of women, which makes them more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection, thereby partly accounting for the high incidence of the disease in Africa. The poor economic condition of most of the women/girls makes them easy preys and cheap sex gratifying tools in the hands of the relatively more financially empowered males in the communities. In this way, the disadvantaged economic status of the women serves as a weakness which lures some un-willing women into accepting unwanted advances from men; the bulk of which, most likely, results in unprotected sexual intercourse.

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[18] O. A. Akinsan, "Women and the Church: An Appraisal" in Dopama A. P. Abubakre R. D. et al. eds., *Religion, Leadership and Society: Focus on Nigeria,* Nigerian Association for the Study of Religion, 2004, 99-100.

8. Cultural Inequality

As it is very well known, culture is the totality of the way of life of a people.[19] In both the material and immaterial aspect of the African cultures, there seems to have been entrenched, gender inequality, inspired by patriarchy and stereotypes. The culture of the Africans appears predominantly to favour the male and disadvantage the female gender. For example, Africans generally seem to prefer the male child over and above the female child. In Africa, the birth of a male child is generally far more valued and celebrated than the birth of a female child. In Nigeria, for instance, the newly born male child is often heard described as the delivery of "full current" or "full voltage" (a highly valued phenomenal in electrical power supply, especially in a country with dire energy problems), whereas that of the female child is derided from birth as the birth of "along the road" or "ashawo" (local term or name for prostitute). This not only has the effect of injuring the female's feelings, but more so, has the harmful consequence of setting a low societal estimation of a woman's worth and negatively psychically conditioning the female for a life of easy virtue, with its attendant possibility of festering the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Another character of African culture which is very critical to the issues of gender inequality and the phenomenal of HIV/AIDS is to be found in the area of marriage. In Africa, the most popular form of marriage is the polygamous type, where a man can legitimately marry more than one woman as wife at the same time.[20] This type of marriage is legitimized by the various Native Laws and Customs of the people. Unlike the practice in the developed societies of Europe and America, where there are various legislations which forbids polygamous marriages as bigamy, Africa societies officially allow and recognizes both the monogamous and polygamous marriages. Polygamous marriages are not only tolerated, allowed and recognized in Africa, they are often valued, celebrated and glamorized as evidence of a man's prosperity and virility.[21]

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[19] M. E. Omohan, "Society, Culture and the Individual" in Isiramen C.O. and Elekhame L. A. eds., *Reading in General Studies* Vol.2, Ekpoma A.A.U Publishing House, 2004, 112-114.

[20] M. E Omohan, "African World View" in Isiramen C. O. and Flekhame L. A. eds., *Reading in General Studies*, vol. 2, Ekpoma A.A.U Publishing House, 2004, 142.

In addition, a man in Africa is not considered to have committed adultery if he has sexual dealings with a woman, other than his wife, who at the time is not another man's wife. Hence, even in marriage, a man may keep other lovers as mistresses and concubines. Considering the sexually permissive attitude of Africans in favour of the men, the health risk to the women especially those in a polygamous relationship is very high. Thus, a polygamous man who has other sexual relationships outside his marriage may get infected of HIV from one of such relationships and come home to possibly infest all his wives. This, perhaps, partly explains the very high incidence of female infections which is due to their vulnerability rather than promiscuity as it may sometimes be imagined or assumed.

In many African communities, the practice of female circumcision (*clitoridectomy*) is rife. This practice of female genital mutilation has become difficult to effectively discourage because it is popularized and perpetrated by patriarchy which seeks to achieve a dwindled libido in women. This practice, which has been variously criticized as unhealthy, terrible and a breach of the women's right, tends to have some fundamental implications for HIV/AIDS status in the continent. For example, in some African societies, circumcision rites are a communal ritual performed for all female members of the community as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood.[22] At such events, all the young girls are collectively circumcised with the dangerous possibility of mass infection of HIV, in view of the obviously high level of bloodletting and the likelihood of the use of un-sterilized tools at such occasions. In addition, the manipulatively decreased sexual drive in circumcised women makes a more intense and vigorous sexual intercourse necessary to reach orgasm, thereby increasing the chances of epidermal laceration of the virginal favourable for HIV transmission.

Finally on the cultural note, the subject matter of sex is treated as sacred in Africa. The actual reason for this is uncertain. However, it is believed that religious and moral sentiments inform this attitude. This explains why sex is hardly publicly discussed in Africa, especially by women. For example, euphemistic words or phrases are employed to refer to sexual intercourse and sexual organs. This sacred and reserved attitude towards sex makes the indulgence in it a highly secretive act. This secretive mode of engaging in sexual affairs makes the keeping of many shrouded multiple sexual relationships, which are un-disclosed, un-discussed and possibly un-protected, likely to be common in Africa; and un-protected sex has been acknowledged as one of the principle medium of transmitting the HIV and spreading AIDS.

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[21] Omohan, "African World View," 142.

[22] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 91-92.

9. Social Inequality

Socially, women in Africa are largely discriminated against. Generally, the female folks are more to be seen than to be heard. In fact, the married women are almost treated as properties of their husbands, whom they are supposed to loyally and lovingly serve and if they do not, expected to be thrown out of the marriage; an institution which is believed to confer the highest honour and social value on the women in Africa. Hence, many Africans believe that women exist for the purpose of attending to the domestic, sexual and procreative needs of men. Women/girls are also commonly regarded as housekeepers and not economic, social or political drivers in African societies. To most Africans, the place of the women is the home and not pubic life. This perhaps explains why females are mostly the ones who are hired as house helpers, a phenomenon also known as domestic slavery. As house helpers, female children and young girls are often abused sexually, by the male members in such homes.[23] Thus, women become the most vulnerable segment of the society to HIV infection, occasioned by abuses arising largely from sentiments and attitudes born out of social inequality.

In Africa, it is wrongly believed that a man's social status and virility is evidenced by his philandering character while the women are branded as prostitutes if they attempt to relate with more than one man. In the campaign against HIV/AIDS in Africa, emphasis is placed on the use of condom by men. Female condoms are not popular and hardly available. The available male condoms are expected not to be found with or kept by women. Whenever a woman is found keeping condoms or request for its use in an intercourse, she is often quickly branded a whore. Thus, with the adverse attitude of Africans towards women keeping and using sexually protective devises such as condoms, the permissive and philandering attitude of the men becomes doubly dangerous.

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[23] D. O. Akhilomen, "Addressing Child Abuse in Southern Nigeria: The Role of the Church" in Alistair K. Ed. *Studies in World Christianity*, vol. 12, pt 3, The Edinburgh Review of Theology and Religion, 2006.

Finally, the gender influence on social relations in virtually all African communities virtually assign the role of catering for the health and wellbeing of members of the homes, families and communities to the women. Gender role distinction or discrimination in this regard is widespread in Africa. Hence, women have had practically foisted on them, solely by virtue of their sex, the gender role of acting as nurses and caring for the sick. This social inequality of gender role discrimination becomes critical to the issue of HIV/AIDS in the area of the care and support for people living with the virus or the disease. In fact, women become the most affected group in the society not only because they constitute the bulk of those infected, but also because they become almost solely saddled with the responsibility of nursing those infected, and caring for those affected (for example, those orphaned)by the scourge.

10. The Bahai Principle of Gender Equality to Combat HIV/AIDS

The Bahai is a religion which seems to adopt exceptional attitude towards contemporary social problems. The faith's scriptures and the diverse activities of its membership speak to virtually every important trend in the world today; from new thinking about cultural diversity and environmental conservation to the decentralization of decision making; from a renewed commitment to family life and moral values to the call for social and economic justice in a globalizing world.[24] This, perhaps, also explains why the Bahai faith seems to have an inimitable stance on the question of gender inequality among humans.

On the issue of gender inequality, the Bahai position is manifestly unambiguous, requiring no special reinterpretation or apologies in an era of increasing campaign for the equality of the sexes. As Jane Khan rightly said, "there is little sense of apology or justification. That is because the Bahai Faith not only explicitly upholds the spiritual equality of women and men in its sacred scriptures but also unequivocally states that this equality must today be 'expressed in both individual and social practice.'[25] The Bahai position concerning gender inequality can be distinctly appreciated from the educational, social, cultural and economic perspectives as it affects the incidence of HIV/AIDS in Africa.

For a global society to flourish, Baha Allah said, it must be based on certain fundamental principles, which include: the elimination of all forms of prejudice; full equality between the sexes; the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth; universal education; the harmony of science and religion; and the oneness of humanity.[26] The Bahai faith has a system of values that categorically upholds the principle of the equality of women and men in all areas of human endeavour. The Bahai faith's advocacy of the principle of gender equality is especially vital in those parts of the world, including Africa, where the rights of women are traditionally and persistently denied; negatively manifesting in sundry socio-economic problems and the very high incidence of HIV/AIDS in the-Saharan continent.

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[24] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 188.

[25] Cited in "Reinterpreting Religion without Reference to Gender," *One Country*, vol. 13. 3, October-December 2001.

A key area where the Bahai holds the capacity for addressing the HIV/AIDS scourge in the African continent is in the call for gender equality in the field of education. Education has been generally acknowledged as a vital ingredient for human and societal development. In the Bahai faith, great emphasis is placed on education as a means also of promoting the advancement of women. As it is well known, education provides opportunity for the acquisition of knowledge and moral values conducive to social evolution, the development of the mind, and training in logical and analytical thinking, organizational, administrative and management skills, as well as enhanced self esteem and improved status within the community.[27] These many advantages which education confers, understandably explains why the Bahai religion advocates that girls and boys follow the same curriculum in school. Women are encouraged by the Bahai religion to study the arts, crafts, sciences and professions and to enter all fields of work, even those traditionally regarded as belonging to the exclusive province of men.[28] The Bahai religion does not only uphold the principle of universal education, it also accords priority to the education of girls and women when and where resources are limited. This "affirmative policy" or practice of "positive discrimination" in favour of the female gender by the Bahai teaching is justified with the argument that "it is only through educated mother that the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society," mothers being "the first educators of the next generation."[29]

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[26] http://religionsmovements.lib.virginia.edu, Retrieved on the 7/6/2007.

[27] C. Maduka, *Philosophy of General Concerns of Education,* Nigeria: Society for Social Philosophy Policy and Research, 1998, 33-36, 237.

[28] J. A. Khan, "Introduction," *The Greatness Which Might Be Theirs,* Beijing, China, Wilmette Bahai Publishing Trust, 1995, 1-2. see also http://statements.bahai.org

[29] "Two Wings of a Bird: A Statement on the Equality of Men and Women" by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahai's of the United States, www.bahai.us

The principle of gender equality in the field of education among other things, guarantees the enlightenment and acquisition of skills by women. Education, informed by the ideal of the equality of the sexes, holds the promise of equipping African women with increased knowledge of how to take care of themselves and others in the society, especially on the subject of HIV/AIDS. This point will perhaps become easier to appreciate when it is realized that the incidence of HIV/AIDS is inversely proportional to the level of education of the various communities in the world. This probably explains why the developed societies of Europe and America evidently have a lower incidence of HIV/AIDS than the less educated and developed communities in Africa and Asia.[30]

From the social perspective, the principle of the equality of the sexes which is based upon the more fundamental Bahai principle of the "oneness of humankind" also holds the prospects of aiding in the war against HIV/AIDS in Africa. This is especially true in the areas of prevention, care and support. In the Bahai faith, it is taught that the recognition of the basic "oneness of humankind" is a prerequisite to social evolution and the future well-being of the earth and its peoples. Fundamental to this concept of the oneness of humanity is the principle of the equality of the sexes. According to Baha Allah, "women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God."[31] The imperatives of gender equality and the interdependence of the sexes is further expressed in the Bahai writing with the image of humanity as a bird in which one wing is women and the other man. Unless both wings are strong and well-developed, the bird will not be able to fly.[32] This Bahai analogy is consistent with that expressed by Nigeria's former foreign affairs minister, Prof (Mrs.) Joy Ogwu, OFR who described women as the right leg of a man, whose co-operation and support is crucial for man's ability to walk or run.[33] The development of women is therefore considered vital to the full development of men and is seen by the Bahai as a prerequisite to peace and development.

/node/123, Retrieved on the 8/6/2007 "The Impact of Racism on Women," written statement submitted by the Bahai international Community to the 45th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, New York, U.S.A., 6-16 March, 2001.

[30] "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome" *in Microsoft Encarta Reference Library*, 2002.

[31] http://www.bahai.us/node 123. Retrieved on the 11/6/2007.

[32] htt://www.bahai.us/node/123; "Selections from the Writings of Abdul-Baha," 227, 302 (Women 16) Retrieved on the 2/11/2007.

[33] Joy Ogwu, Nigeria Presidential Inauguration Lecture, Nigerian Television Authority's Live Telecast, 28th May, 2007.

The principle of equality, as advocated by the Bahais, has profound implications for the definition of the roles of women and men; a major area for the expression of the discriminatory gender conception in today's word. The application of the principle of equality requires a change in many traditional habits and practices which will lead to a sincere and non-hypocritical rejection of the rigid role delineation between the male and female sexes. This is particularly important in the care of those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS (the People Living with HIV/AIDS, and those orphaned by the disease) in Africa where patriarchal manipulated stereotyped gender role distinction appears to abandon the care and support of those infected and affected to the women. The direct effect of the Bahai principle of gender equality on the problem of HIV/AIDS in the African continent would be the reduction of the social evils which negatively influences the spread of the disease and the care and support of those infected and affected by the scourge. In this regard, the social disadvantages of gender exploitation and stigmatization which sometimes seems to encourage the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa would be virtually eliminated. Men would then, no longer look upon the women as inferior beings meant only to be exploited for their own pleasure as deemed fit. With this change of social attitude engendered by the Babai principles of gender equality an enhanced sense of self-worth, boosting self-confidence, would be infused into the psyche of women, thereby helping to immune them against the many self abnegation and male abuses often culminating in HIV/AIDS afflictions in Africa.

The Bahai principle of gender equality also seems to be capable of effecting cultural transformations likely to facilitate the successful crusade against HIV/AIDS in Africa. As we have hinted earlier, unlike the African culture which is dominantly patriarchal, advocating the superiority of the male over the female, the Bahai religion emphatically stresses the equality of the sexes. The adoption of the Bahai principle of gender equality is capable of significantly helping to alter the existing patterns of domination and arbitrary decision-making by patriarchal structured social, political and economic arrangements which are especially prominent in Africa. The acceptance and whole hearted application of this principle of equality will strengthen the calls for women to be welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour thereby allowing for the evolution of the roles of both men and women even as they relate to the incidence of HIV/AIDS in Africa. In addition, the Bahai faith appears also to discourage all forms of sexual immorality, polygamy in marriage and the practice of female genital mutilation otherwise known as female circumcision; all of which have the tendency to encourage the spread of HIV/AIDS. More importantly, in the Bahai religion, men and women are considered equal.[34] Hence dialogue and consultation between the sexes are encouraged, even on the subject of sexuality. In this respect therefore, a woman can say "no" to unwanted sexual intercourse or relationship.

The expected effects of a cultural revolution influenced by the Bahai religious principles of gender equality on HIV/AIDS incidence in Africa would therefore include: an enhanced respect and value for women, the reduction of the possibility of multiple infections in multiple sexual relationship as operating in polygamous marriages popular in Africa, and the decreased exploitation of women as tools for pleasure in the hands of men in the society. Above all, the Bahai principle of the "oneness of humankind" generally engenders a culture of non-discrimination; a culture which is particularly fundamental to healthy social attitudes towards the people living with HIV/AIDS who are often discriminated against and stigmatized.

Finally, the Bahai philosophy of compulsory universal education and skill acquisition in an atmosphere of gender equality enhances, in no small measure, the economic empowerment of women. In Bahai communities, women strive to attain the highest they can possibly be, thereby becoming economically empowered. It is instructive to remark at this point that the principle of equality is also capable of influencing the manner in which the advancement of women is fostered. For example, members of the 'Bahai' community, individually and institutionally, share a strong commitment to the practice of the principle of equality in all aspects of social and civic life. Individuals and social institutions in the Bahai community collaborate in encouraging the development and emancipation of women and in designing and implementing programs to enhance their spiritual, social and economic development.[35] Economic empowerment programmes and skill acquisition training schemes are sometimes organized to strengthen the socio-economic potentials of women.[36] Through the economic advantages gained, the women grow to become more objectively independent of men, thus emerging less subject to the manipulation and exploitations of the men. By the economic empowerment of women engendered by the Bahai religious ideas, prostitution is discouraged and therefore reduced, girl child labour and human trafficking, along with their attendant social and health implications are minimized, and a more responsible and self determined attitudes in women is promoted-leading to a reduced incidence of HIV/AIDS which often results from such depraved circumstances. In addition, a generally improved economic situation which could result from unfettered economic relations among the sexes as extolled in the Bahai faith, will certainly engender improved welfare and better health in the African communities whose immune capacities and capabilities would be boosted.

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[34] O. A. Oderinde, "Reaching out of Power: Nigeria Women and Church Leadership," in Dopamu, A. P., Abubakre R. D. et al eds., *Religion, Leadership and Society:* Focus on Nigeria, Nigerian Association for the study of Religion, 2004, 109.

[35] http://www.bahai.us advancement of women, Retrieved on the 2/6/2007.

[36] "Strategies for the Advancement of Women in Africa", *Statement to the Fourth Regional Conference* on the Integration of Women in Development and on the Implementation of the Arusha Strategies for the Advancement of Women in Africa, Agenda item 5: Implementation of the Arusha Strategies for the Advancement

11. Conclusion

In this paper, we have endeavoured to demonstrate that there is a gender dimension to the epidemic level of HIV/AIDS scourge in Africa. In it we sought to establish that the very high incidence of the disease in the continent, especially the predominant cases of female inflections and the gender role distinction which largely abandons the care of those infected and affected by the disease to the females can be accounted for by the factor of gender inequality, strengthened by cultural and social, economic and religious practices founded on patriarchy, reinforced by stereotypes. From our expositions above, it is contended that the comprehensive and genuine adoption of the Bahai religious principles of gender equality, founded on the "oneness of humanity," would help to systematically eliminate the socio-cultural evils of gender discrimination which this paper believes provides the festering platform for the phenomenal spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa. Thus, the principle of gender equality as enunciated in the Bahai faith seems to hold the possibility of effectively ameliorating the HIV/AIDS challenge in Africa while at the same time, addressing and uprooting the socio-cultural evil of discriminations; a vice which accounts for gender inequality and the discrimination and stigmatization of People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in our communities.

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THEOLOGY OF PROVOCATION

An Encounter of Jesus with the Woman

Delfo C. Canceran◆

1. Introduction

> From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose daughter has an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone (Mark 7, 24-30 NRSV).

This biblical passage provides the readers with a starting point of our reflection in feminist theology. This particular story of the Syrophoenician woman indicates both positive and negative points in the over-all issues raised in feminist theological discourses addressed to our dominantly patriarchal) society and church. These feminist discourses provoke our masculine taken-for-granted way of thinking and acting. This feminist provocation calls us to rethink our cherished tradition because of a pressing responsibility for the 'other' who in this case happens to be a woman. Moreover, the 'same' which is referred to the adherents of traditional theology is hopefully challenged in this provocation. Once we heed the challenge, we may never revert back to the 'same' but we start to recast our theological discourses. Even if we remain unchallenged, the provocation remains in our midst; but we are deaf or blind to it. The rereading of the story may open our eyes and ears to the challenge of the

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◆**Dr. Delfo Canceran** OP, aside from parish work, is teaching theology, philosophy and sociology at the University of Santo Tomas (UST) and De la Salle University (DLSU) both in Manila. He is also assigned as the Commissioner of the Justice, Peace and Care of Creation (JPCC) ministry of the Province. He finished his PhD-STD in Theology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KUL), Belgium and did his PhD in Sociology at the University of the Philippines (UP-Diliman).

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woman to Jesus apply its message to us today. The story informs us about the first century biblical world and we can note some salient points that are relevant to our concern.

Let me start with the positive aspects of the story. First, moving from one place to another is indispensable in Jesus' mission of proclaiming the reign of God. In his itineraries, Jesus encounters many things along his way which might have been unexpected or surprising in various ways, like his encounter with the Syrophoenician woman. Travelling to different places, like Tyre, can change our patriarchal mindset and expand our human experience that can even influence our parochial attitude. Going to a specific place may trigger men to rethink their unquestioned worldview. In the story, Jesus wants to withdraw himself from the crowd and take a rest for a while. However, knowing that he is around, people still frequent him. The woman hears of Jesus' presence and comes to see him. Second, the unnamed woman is only characterized culturally as a religious outsider and identified ethnically as a Syrophoenician woman. The woman begs insistently on Jesus for compassion or mercy. At first Jesus seems to ignore her appeal. Due to her insistence, Jesus finally responds to her. The intrusion of the woman in Jesus' life may have disturbed him and consequently created a space for a dialogue. This space becomes a condition of possibility for the inclusion of the woman in Jesus' mission. Moreover, it is her insistent appeal to Jesus that eventually breaks the boundary that separates them whereby the woman traverses the limit. Third, the woman's appeal is not for herself but rather for her daughter's healing and wellbeing. Due to her concern, the mother is forced to appeal and beg to Jesus. This concern to the daughter indicates an intimation or solidarity with her suffering. It is therefore the urgent need that moves her to meet and beseech Jesus at all cost. Ultimately, the woman succeeds in persuading Jesus because he finally healed her daughter from a distance.[1]

Let me now move to the negative aspects of the story. First, the woman bows down at Jesus' feet. Bowing down to someone may indicate not only begging for mercy, but also manifesting submission to an authority. Her address to Jesus as 'sir' or better, 'lord' (Mark, 7, 28 RSV) suggests this subordination. In Greek society, *kyrios* implies an asymmetrical relationship, an overlord who overpowers others.[2] In this case, the woman is submissive to the man Jesus.[3] In a patriarchal world of the biblical era, bowing seems to be a 'natural' or 'normal' thing to do as an expected 'proper' behaviour. Looking back on the early history of the church, where gradual changes were taking place, the church has slowly assimilated the Greco-Roman hierarchy based on the rule of the lords or, in short, patriarchal set-up. We have to keep in mind the difference between Jewish patriarchy with Greco-Roman patriarchy since "Jewish patriarchy at that time was the patriarchy of the politically and economically oppressed people who were fighting for the very survival of their culture and religion."[4] The difference is generally between the patriarchy of a colonized people of a nation and a colonial master of the empire. The Greco-Roman patriarchal world superseded the early Christian notion of discipleship of equals, where women exercised some forms of leadership and power. In the Jesus movement, women and men are involved in the itinerary mission of Jesus as can be gleaned from the New Testament bible. Women are members of the company of Jesus who shared his mission.[5]

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[1] Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998, 122.

Second, the woman goes home and finds her daughter lying on bed and already well. We assume that the woman is in charge of the care of household. There are two reasons for this assumption. First, the 'one-nature' anthropology[6] of Greek philosophy 'hierarchizes' man and woman. In Greek society, woman is 'naturally' subordinated and subjected to man. Second, this 'one-nature' anthropology is extended to society as well.

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[2] Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, 36.

[3] Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 124.

[4] Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters*, 23.

[5] Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Origins*, London: SMC Press, 1983, 285ff.

[6] Fiorenza uses the term 'two-nature' anthropology. However, I prefer to use one-nature because I am more convinced by T. Laqueur, as I shall demonstrate. In Greek philosophy, the 'one' has a prominent place compared to the 'many.' In fact, being is considered one, or coming from the one or returning to the one. This can be seen for instance, as we shall explain, in the case of Plato and Aristotle. See Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Spirituality, Christian Identity, and Catholic Vision," in *WomanSpirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, Carol P. Christ & Judith Plaskow, eds., New York: Harper San Francisco, 1979, 141-3.

Thus, it further creates a distinction between *oikos*[7] (household) and *polis* (city). Just like man and woman, the distinction of *oikos* and *polis* follows a hierarchical arrangement. Applied to early Christians, however, this distinction is ambiguous because *oikos*, as private place is, at some occasions, a public place of Christian worship. Thus, the distinction between *oikos* and *polis* is blurred in so far as Christians are concerned. Nonetheless, in Greek society, women, children and slaves are tied to *oikos* as their destiny. Due to the pre-eminence of *polis* in Greek society, which is the world of free men, *oikos* is then inferior or subordinated to it. The *oikos* is the proper place of inferior women. Though *oikos* may not be as patriarchal as the *polis*, the fact remains that *oikos* is ruled by the so-called *pater familias*.[8] This is seen at the end of the story. While the woman is accorded a 'voice' by arguing with Jesus, she nonetheless remains inside a patriarchal world that relies on man. The 'master' voice of Jesus ends the story.[9]

Jesus (in both Mark and Matthew) and his disciples (in Matthew alone) are provoked by the Syrophoenician woman. It is a provocation by an other, which comes from a woman's voice. The provocation is, of course, occasioned by the sickness of her daughter. It is therefore her daughter's condition that compels her to beg for mercy to Jesus. The insistent appeal of the woman intrudes into the identity of Jesus and his disciples. In a parallel text from the gospel of Matthew (15, 21-28 NRSV), the narrative provides more detailed account. I just would like to mention two of them. First, Jesus' mission is explicitly stated there, which is limited 'to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' In this case, Jesus reveals his "religious prejudice and exclusivist identity."[10] The woman's powerful appeal may have unsettled Jesus that he is unable to resist it. The woman even puts Jesus' mission into question where his argument "turns against itself [and] overcomes the prejudice of Jesus."[11] His exclusive mission is transgressed by the woman because after the argument, it is no longer limited to the Jews, but to the Gentiles as well. Jesus' indifference to the woman is shattered, so to speak, because, in the story, he eventually responds to the appeal and grants it. Second, the disciples tried to stop the woman by urging Jesus to send her away. The disciples are also affected by her appeal because they wanted to silence her. Perhaps, they are also disturbed by the woman that is why they would like to dismiss her so that she would disappear from their sight. They could do that, of course, but her voice will always reverberate in their memory and discomfort their complacency.

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[7] According to Rosemary Radford Ruether, the "home which was once itself the center of the public life has now become a ghetto within which women were confined." See Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Sexism and Liberation: The Historical Experience," in *From Machismo to Mutuality: Essays on Sexism and Woman-Man Liberation*, Eugene Bianchi & Rosemary Radford Ruether, New York: Paulist Press, 1976, 8.

[8] Schuttroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters*, 31.

[9] Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 123-4

[10] Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 122.

[11] Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 122.

2. Emergence of the Other

Let us continue reflecting on the history of the many 'Syrophoenician women' spread all over the world across different cultures. History has been undoubtedly written by men who are biased on their accounts by centering on men. Women merely hear about this history and admire men's achievements. Although it is a history of people (both women and men), it is told from the viewpoint of men and framed in a patriarchal worldview. In her book, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, G. Lerner argues that "men have explained the world in their own terms and defined the important questions so as to make themselves the centre of discourse."[12] Thus, men are centred by having the prerogative to represent the world. Women have to refer to these representations in order to be understood and accepted. The Scripture writers are not exempted from the grip or sway of patriarchy because they are also socialized into it and being affected by it. We still read the patrilineal scripts and hear the paternal voices speaking through the texts. To borrow J. Exum's expressions, 'murder they wrote' because the voice of women have been 'executed' and 'silenced by the text;' and again, women are 'raped by the pen,' to use her other phrase, because they have been violated and forced in this world.[13] Historically, women have been questioning this patriarchal world, though in the past they have been muted and ignored. Nowadays, they stand for their right and fight for their freedom.

What is the 'root' of woman's subordination in the world? According to E. Schüssler Fiorenza, woman's subordination is rooted in Greek anthropology. This is corroborated by the theory of R. Ruether, who traces the root of this subordination from sexual dualism which is the foundation of other unequal relations.[14] This dualism becomes more pronounced in the emergence of 'transcendental subject' in modernity as a self-conscious and self-referential ego which differentiates or distinguishes itself from its other. In this sexual division, man is opposed to and separated from woman. Through this sexual binarism, man is centred at the expense of the excluded woman. Since the woman is cut off from man, man is estranged from his other. Thus, the "domination of women is rooted in the fundamental schism and alienation in the male psyche."[15]

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[12] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, New York: & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 220.

[13] J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narrative*, Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1981, 16-41, 176-201.

This theory should be nuanced, however. According to T. Laqueur, there is a distinction between 'one-sex model' of the pre-Enlightenment period, and 'two-sex model' of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment period. In a 'one-sex model,' men and women are "arranged according to their degree of metaphysical perfection."[16] This can be shown in the idea of Plato and Aristotle followed by Augustine and Thomas that man embodies the perfect model of humanity. This one-sex model is framed in a masculine perspective in order to valorise the cultural achievement of patriarchy.[17] In a 'two-sex model,' men and women are explained in a "radical dimorphism of biological divergence."[18] In this model, the two sexes are anatomically opposed, which replaces the metaphysical hierarchy of one-sex model. At this stage, we can properly speak of binary opposition of sexes, not just hierarchical perfection. Comparatively, female body is always in a disadvantaged position because she is an empty category or deficient state which needs filling or completing. In both cases, however, these two models of viewing sex are placed within a power relation between men and women. Feminism can be seen as a struggle against patriarchy that pursues equivalent rights between the sexes rather than something that generates war between the sexes. In this way, feminism is not just the liberation of women from the bondage of subordination but also the liberation of men from the prison of patriarchy that entraps the two sexes into this limiting world.[19]

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[14] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1975, 3.

[15] Rosemary Radford Ruether, Women's Liberation in Historical and Theological Perspective," in *Women's Liberation and the Church: The New Demands for Freedom in the Life of the Christian Church*, Sarah Doeley, ed., New York: Association Press, 1970, 27.

[16] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: Harvard University Press, 1990, 5.

[17] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 20.

[18] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 6.

In her classic work, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir has persuasively argued that throughout history, woman has been considered as an 'other' of man.[20] This is evident even in the linguistic component of 'woman' (wo + man). There seems to be an idea that 'woman' is always dependent on or derivative from man. The prefix 'wo,' which cannot stand by itself is always affixed to the 'man,' which can stand by itself so that it can form an intelligible word 'wo+man'. This would suggest a fated dependency of woman from man. Language seems to favour man and to disadvantage woman. Moreover, patriarchy has deprived women of an equal opportunity with men by imprisoning her into the household world. The world seems to be split between the world of the home and the world of the work wherein women are consigned to household chores while men are elevated to the workplace. Thus the domestic work of women is unpaid and this condition keeps her dependent on men for her needs. Women are fixed with the home as a place of sex and reproduction. Women can never achieve an equal status of autonomy compared to men because they are always portrayed as subordinate to men, if not opposite to men.

There is some ambiguity in the way Simone de Beauvoir goes on explicating the situation of woman as the other of man. This other is not absolutely outside of the 'same' but merely positioned ambivalently because she is neither a complete insider nor a complete outsider. Thus, her ambivalent position does not completely paralyze her status, but empowers her to shift from one place to the other. Thus, she can use this ambivalence to her advantage. In her conclusion, de Beauvoir states that "… woman is opaque in her very being; she stands before man not as a subject but as an object paradoxically endued with subjectivity; she takes herself simultaneously as *self* and as *other*, a contradiction that entails baffling consequences."[21] Thus, paradoxically her ambivalent position provides her a better position because of her mobility by shuttling her position and occupying both standpoints of the same and the other. Thus, knowing both positions, she can hurl her critique of the universal pretension of patriarchy.

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[19] Ruether, *Sexism and Liberation*, 8.

[20] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, H. M. Parshley, ed. & trans., New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

[21] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 718.

3. Various Faces of the Other

In the story, the Syropheonician woman is the other of Jesus (and his disciples). This otherness is clearly shown in that encounter being a woman and an outsider. However, the woman did not allow herself to be completely trapped or imprisoned into the patriarchal world, but she struggled in the process and succeeded in the end. The woman envisions an 'otherwise' identity by becoming an agent of change. However, this otherwise woman is not well represented in the story and it is our responsibility to pursue it. The reason of the 'silence' of the otherwise other is that there are limits imposed on her by the narrative by ending it. Though we can infer from the story an otherwise Jesus because as the story unfolds, Jesus gives in to the demand, we can also imagine an otherwise woman who argues with Jesus. In our discussion, we are more interested with the otherwise woman in our imagination. We need to pursue a 'feminist reading' that will open up the story into possibilities. Feminist reading subverts a text by interrogating and breaking it; it creates a fissure of political space where woman can insert her experience and regain her subjectivity. Woman refuses to be subsumed by man or merely replace him.

For Levinas in his discussion of the 'other,' the other remains to be external to the 'subject.'[22] The subject "is in itself outside the subject."[23] In his ethics, we cannot start from the subject or else we revert back to the 'ego' or the 'same.' Thus, we need to start from the other, not the subject. The 'other' always provokes the subject. In this way, the subject is redefined or 'conscientized' by the other. The other that comes from outside incessantly awakens the subject. There is a primacy of responsibility of the subject to the other. "This is the subject irreplaceable for the responsibility there assigned to him, and who therein discovers a new identity."[24] The subject cannot grasp the other for it slips away. The Syrophoenician woman remains to be external, to be other, to the man

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[22] Arguably, Levinas' terminology has an androcentric bias. His notion of 'other' is susceptible to a male-privileged interpretation. See, Luce Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love," Margareth Whitford, trans., in *Re-Reading Levinas*, Robert Bernascoli & Simon Critchley, eds., Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991, 109-118.

[23] Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, Michael B. Smith, trans., California: Stanford University Press, 1994, 151-8.

[24] Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, Bettina Bergo, trans., California: Stanford University Press, 1998, 73.

Jesus. He could not take hold of her or dissolve her 'alterity,' even by his disciples. This is the first sense of 'other.'

The second sense is taken from Foucault, following Nietzsche.[25] 'Other' means the reinvention or remaking of self or subjectivity. The self or subjectivity is a discursive effect, placed within power relations. The power relations that exist between the same and the other are strategically situated to each other. There are always forms of ongoing resistance, not mere blind obedience in power relations. "It means that we always have possibilities, there are always possibilities of changing the situation."[26] Consequently, the subject can locally resist some forms of fixation, stabilization or definition. Since we are placed in power relations, we can always struggle or resist any discursive constitution. Thus, the other can resist the same and recreate itself. Our own subjectivity is not something determined by nature or fixed by socialization. Though it is discursively constituted, it is not determined. It can be altered, subverted or recreated, if we will.

The third sense of 'other' is the 'otherness' of God. This sort of otherness is best captured by a tension between 'alteration' and 'alterity' of God. However, alteration precedes alterity. In her book, *A History of God*, K. Armstrong concludes that "our personal deity, who because of 'his' gender, has been a male since tribal, pagan days."[27] Since our 'God' has been discursively constituted as a patriarch, we cannot logically begin with this patriarchal notion of 'God'. We need a major surgical operation, so to speak, in order that this God can be reinstalled. Thus, we need to subject this God into a deconstructive critique, not to purify it, but rather to open its possibilities. As K. Bloomquist titles her essay: "Let God be God."[28] We can therefore 'depatriarchalized' God and reconstruct God. Second, one needs to retain God's alterity. God should remain 'beyond being.' The reason is that one should always be wary of the inadequate symbol or language that we use to name or conceptualize this 'unnamable' and mysterious God. Furthermore, this transfigured God should always call one to responsibility for the other. As Levinas puts it, God "wakes thought up."[29] Thus, "the idea of God causes the breakup of the thinking."[30] This God will always question the subject in her/his responsibility for the misery suffered by woman as the other. "The Word of God in that misery committing him to a responsibility impossible to gainsay."[31]

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[25] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Thomas Common, trans. & Nicholas Davey, intro., Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1997.

[26] Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth; Essential Works of Foucault*, 1954-1984, vol. I, Paul Rabinow, ed., New York: New Press, 1997, 167.

[27] Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000 Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1993, 454.

[28] Karen Bloomquist, "'Let God Be God'": The Theological Necessity of Depatriarchalizing God," in *Our Naming of God: Problems and Prospects of God-Talk Today*, Carl E. Baaten, ed., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989, 45.

Furthermore, in these three senses of 'other,' one should note that in history, these three senses of the other have been applied differently to woman and to man using the logic of binary opposition. This would mean that historically, woman has been identified with the inferior parts of humanity such as immanence, carnality and sensuality, having negative connotations, while God has been identified with transcendence, infinity, absoluteness, having positive implications. Man partakes of both qualities because he possesses both form and matter, intellect and passion and transcendence and immanence. However, behind this privileged place of a man is a deep-seated fear. This fear is a disavowal of his other 'nature' but, at the same time, an incapacity to escape from and live without.[32] As far as man is concerned, the 'other' usually represents some part of man that he needs "to repudiate, vilify and reject as a condition of consciousness itself."[33] Woman's difference to man is that she has accepted her carnality, sensuality and embodiment but struggled for her recognition, profession and transcendence; while man repudiates his body, passion and immanence by capitalizing his privileged position in a patriarchal world.

4. Interruption of the Woman

> But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." (Mark 7, 28 NRSV)
>
> She said, "Yes, Lord yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." (Matthew 15, 27 NRSV)

At first glance, the difference between the two versions seems to be negligible. But upon close scrutiny, it reveals an empowering difference that can transform the world. Both verses identify the interlocutor of Jesus as an outsider woman. The woman "represents the biblical-theological voice of women, which has been excluded, repressed or marginalized in Christian discourse."[34] The introductory word 'but' spells out the crucial difference between the two verses. This 'but' signifies an interruption or discontinuity to the 'malestream' theological argument of Jesus.[35] The action of the woman is derived from her daughter's situation that pushes her to argue with Jesus and such action opens the condition of possibility for the woman's voice. Looking at the woman, she is able to argue with Jesus because of her need. This need is an experience that she perceives and feels to be urgent. It is the life of her daughter that is at stake. Thus, the Markan 'but' makes a significant twist not only from a rhetorical viewpoint, but also from a political standpoint. By introducing the sentence with a 'but,' the horizon is opened up to the woman empowering her to bring out what she needs (daughter's sickness), what she feels (Jesus' bias), what she thinks (her insistence) towards Jesus. In a society marked by silencing of female voices, the argument must have been an experience of breaking the deadening silence that has imprisoned her in society that eventually releases her power and liberates her subjectivity. The 'but' enables her marginal voice to be inserted into the ubiquitous patriarchal world. Thus, the 'but' creates cracks or fissures where a space is created in positioning herself vis-à-vis the preaching mission of Jesus.

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[29] Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 66.

[30] Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 63.

[31] Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, 158.

[32] Paula Cooey, "Emptiness, Otherness, and Identity: A Feminist Perspective," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 6, 1990, 11.

[33] Mary Condren, "The Theology of Sacrifice and the Non-Ordination of Women," *Concilium: The Non-Ordination of Women and the Politics of Power*, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Herman Haring, eds., London: SMC Press & New York: Orbis Books, 1999, 55.

There are two utterances of 'buts' in the history of feminist movement. Considering women's historical position, in its early stage, feminist critique has primarily revolved around 'denunciation' of patriarchy. This is understandable since the 'consciousness-raising' method of feminism has awakened them from this appalling victimization and distressing subordination in society and church specifically addressed to men who are the visible representatives of patriarchy. This emerging feminist consciousness paves the way for ventilating women's discontents and grievances by denouncing the master plot of men that has historically marginalized and excluded them. They hurl their strong criticism against the pernicious 'universal claim' of patriarchal discourse since it only favours half of the population that speaks on behalf of humanity. This master plot has become the privileged 'normative discourse.' Thus, history is told only according to men's perspective discounting women's participation.

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[34] Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, 11.

[35] Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 11-3.

As it develops further, feminist discourse shift from denunciation to 'annunciation' of women's differences and experiences. This annunciation provides women the affirmation and representation of their subjectivities creating possibilities that can advance their potentiality and agency. Though the ideology critique of patriarchy is, no doubt, of significance, feminists have realized that they need to refocus their efforts in articulating their own worldview transcending the combative tendency of denunciation. Women need not only denounce men, but also reconstruct women, as E. Schüssler Fiorenza suggests.[36] This transcendence should not give us the impression that they have given up critique; rather they have shifted the focus of their effort. Moreover, critique and affirmation should not be taken separately but they should be interwoven together so that feminism can become more effective and intense in transforming society and church.

5. Feminist Schism on Reconstruction

The effort at reconstructing the self and subjectivity has created an internal division among feminist theologians. The 'but' has opened the gates of criticism against patriarchy so that it will no longer revert back to patriarchy but rather the landscape of theology should be transformed by the dent of feminist provocation. For feminists, the 'but' has elicited two possibilities which can be labelled as Christian (also called reformist) feminists and post-Christian (also called revolutionary) feminists. In the first category, we can name R. Ruether, and E. Schüssler Fiorenza, while in the second category, we can identify C. Christ and D. Hampson. The basic disagreement between these two groups is the problematic status of tradition. Christian feminists remain to work within Judeo-Christian tradition by filtering out the patriarchy and retrieving prophecy in tradition. However, they do not just rely on official tradition, but they widen their horizon because they too admit the limitations imposed by tradition. R. Ruether and E. Schüssler Fiorenza have exemplified this attempt in ideology critique of patriarchal or kyriarchal tradition. They work from within Christianity and try to reform this tradition. On the contrary, the post-Christian feminists break from tradition because for them tradition is irredeemably patriarchal. Thus the only way out left is an exodus from the church.

Christian feminists like E. Schüssler Fiorenza and R. Ruether insist on returning to Christian origins. They still consider Christianity as potentially liberating. By reading critically on the texts of Christian Scriptures, E. Schüssler Fiorenza locates women from the Jesus movement in early Christianity who are visibly marginalized or excluded. These marginalized or excluded women are surfaced and resuscitated from the texts and history and are provided a rhetorical space to interrogate the texts. By interrogating the texts, she created or widened the space for women. This space will allow feminists to reclaim the '*ekklesia* of women.' R. Ruether looks for materials beyond the limits of Judeo-Christian traditions and discovers the many potential resources for feminists in reconstructing history of women. Both E. Schüssler Fiorenza and R. Ruether are convinced that by critically rereading history and tradition, they can redeem the erasure of women. Moreover, Christian feminists emphasize the prophetic message of the reign of God which the prophets and Jesus preached and announced to the world. The message of the reign of God clearly sides with the poor and the oppressed people. Patriarchy or kyriarchy circumvent the *kerygma* of the reign of God; it is definitely anti-reign of God which must be criticized and abrogated at the roots.

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[36] Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 105.

Both E. Schüssler Fiorenza and R. Ruether operate within the logic of an eventual forming of a meta-narrative of women as evident in their words such as 'fullness' or 'totality' or 'wholeness.' They "assert a universal and common essence that somehow defined women as women, and that laid the basis for feminist solidarity as well as providing the content for feminist reflection."[37] First, E. Schüssler Fiorenza and R. Ruether operate within the discourse of ideology critique, pointing out to an overarching ideology of kyriarchy or patriarchy. Second, the fundamental framework of the reign of God in liberation theology encompasses the whole of humanity. Liberation theology brings to view the struggle for liberation of people from all forms of evils, including patriarchy. Liberation is realized primarily in the equality of human beings, not in their irreducible differences.[38] In a way, their thinking remains to be a utopia which is always a negation of patriarchy. A negative feminist critical theory of religion must resist premature reconciliation with any aspect of present reality. In the absence of a complete transformation of society and humanity, reconciliation can be nothing more than accommodation or assimilation.[39]

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[37] Rebecca S. Chopp, "Theorizing Feminist Theology" in *Horizon in Feminist Theology, Identity, Tradition and Norms*, Rebecca Chopp and Sheila Greeve Daveney, eds., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997, 217.

[38] Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid, "On Wearing Skirts without Underwear: 'Indecent Theology Challenging the Liberation Theology of the Pueblo,' Poor Women Contesting Christ," *Feminist Theology* 20, 1999, 42.

Moreover, they accept the relevance of metaphoric language for this 'unnamable' and 'ineffable' God of history in solidarity with the poor and oppressed in history. As explained by S. McFague, metaphor is like a whisper, "it is and it is not."[40] This 'it is' is explicit (like saying God is a Mother), while, 'it is not' is implicit (like saying God is not a Mother). This understanding indicates that this God is inclusive of both female and male metaphors that can be used to refer to God. In this way, female and male metaphors can coexist in God.[41]

D. Hampson understands Judaism and Christianity with reference to a 'history' which reflects a patriarchal worldview.[42] This worldview is deeply entrenched into these religions that they are irremediably hopeless. Like D. Hampson, C. Christ considers patriarchy as deeply rooted in Christianity. However, she goes beyond that by indicting this patriarchal God. For her, this patriarchal God should be made accountable for the exclusion of women in history and tradition.[43] According to D. Hampson, feminism is a 'revolution' to distinguish it from 'reform,' implicitly referring to reformist feminists (such as R. Ruether and E. Schüssler Fiorenza). The logical move of revolution is to break from these patriarchal religions.[44] This break is compelled by women's realization of their exclusion from these traditions and therefore post-Christians have to devise ways and means in order to compensate for their frustration and deprivation.

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[39] Marsha Aileen Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion: A Feminist Analysis*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 227-8.

[40] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 13.

[41] This use of female and male metaphors for God would, however, in a way, re-inscribe sexual dualism that can lead to subordination of woman. The reason is that 'metaphorical language' implies its opposite, 'literal language.' This would mean that we can demarcate the line where literal meaning ends, and where metaphor begins, and vice versa. As far as it is used, the literal would mean an 'ostensive' meaning of a word. However, this is contrary to the idea that meaning of a word is 'polysemic.' People can mean different things to the same word depending upon their experiences. In short, it is difficult to establish the difference between 'literal' and 'metaphorical' level of linguistic use.

[42] Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, 1.

[43] Carol P. Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess*, New York: Harper San Francisco, 1987, 3, 12.

[44] Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, 2.

In order to be free from this patriarchal religion, P. Christ breaks from what she perceives as patriarchal tradition and explores her personal experience in search for God. She realizes that breaking from tradition is a struggle of inventing new language based on her personal experiences.[45] The Goddess religion provides a relief and hope for her recovery from the death of God. Moreover, D. Hampson also points out the irreducible differences of women from men and from among women themselves. These differences should be given space and be allowed to flourish. In this understanding, feminism is a different way of viewing the world.[46] In the absence of a religion, women are free to experiment and to explore the world in its variety and diversity. They have to create symbols of their own making, without any tradition or history that takes control of their imaginative innovations. This can be accomplished by creating different thought patterns that express women's understanding of God and humanity. There is no idea of a vision of 'fullness,' totality or 'wholeness' as R. Ruether and E. Schüssler Fiorenza insist, but only about women emerging into their own way of viewing the world using their personal experiences.

This thealogy (with the Goddess) has been heavily criticized by R. Ruether and E. Schüssler Fiorenza. According to them, these post-Christian feminists merely replace the patriarchal God with the matriarchal Goddess, which would therefore uncritically re-inscribe binary worldview prevalent in patriarchy. C. Christ argues, however, that "women, who have been deprived of a female religious symbol systems for centuries are therefore in an excellent position to recognize the power and primacy of symbols."[47] R. Ruether argues that the tradition of Mother Goddess religion is not 'completely 'feminist,' but "more or less androcentric."[48] Hence, she warns that this Goddess religion in history has been a patriarchal construct that serves men's own needs. C. Christ counters that "though this is true for the Goddess traditions, like Jewish and Christian traditions in the Near East and ancient Mediterranean world that R.

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[45] Carol P. Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite*, xii.

[46] Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, 2.

[47] Carol P. Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections," in *WomanSpirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., New York: Harper San Francisco, 1979, 279.

[48] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *WomanGuides: Readings towards a Feminist Theology*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996, xvi.

Ruether continually cites, it is unlikely that this was true of the prehistoric Goddess traditions of these same areas."[49] E. Schüssler Fiorenza comments that this thealogy "too quickly concedes that women have no authentic history within biblical tradition."[50] However, D. Hampson points that "the core symbolism of Christianity is masculine."[51] On the contrary, E. Schüssler Fiorenza believes that there are still potential materials found in Christianity by reconstructing its origins. D. Hampson points out that "there is considerable evidence that greater equality prevailed between women and men in the cult of some ancient polytheistic communities."[52]

6. Appeal to Men

In a roundtable discussion on the topic: *The Influence of Feminist Theory on My Theological Work*, a consensus has emerged among male theologians that patriarchy has crept into the foundation of theology in "its very way of doing theology."[53] Realizing that, we also need to re-think the way theology is done and constructed. Feminist theology is not just something added to theology, but it is something critical to theology because of its critical component. According to David Tracy, feminist theology is "the intellectual conscience of all Christian theology in our period." [54] However, instead of heeding to the appeal of the feminists, the institutional church has resented it because it is seen as "disruptive and upsetting."[55] The church should always be open to 'signs of the times' in order to change for the better.

Patriarchy is defined not only as a rule of men, but also as a masculine worldview. This worldview is imbibed by women and men alike, who, consciously or unconsciously, maintain and reproduce it. Women who become conscious of their subordination usually feel outraged to men and men who are sympathetic to women in turn feel guilty of it. However, we have to be aware that patriarchy can assume many forms that are, in many ways, invisible. There are monsters which can oppress and exclude many women. The appeal is therefore addressed to many men and few women who, in one way or the other, and, in varying degrees, continue and perpetuate the evils of patriarchy. There is a need for consciousness-raising of both women and men in getting rid of these evils that victimize women. This conscientization requires not just translating a text to a non-sexist and inclusive language, but also changing our consciousness, making it more respectful and affirmative of differences. Consciousness-raising should also be accompanied and supported by changes of many social structures that support and reproduce it. Patriarchy is not only found in our speech, but it is ingrained in our very social structure. Hence, language and social structure should be changed together. "Structural change and linguistic change go hand-in-hand."[56] The 'personal is political' is a rallying political discourse of feminists who would like to include the personal aspect which has been almost politically rendered 'invisible.' This personal is affected by or connected to the socio-cultural and geo-political domain of our lives.

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[49] Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite*, 15.

[50] Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xviii-xix.

[51] Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, 109.

[52] Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, 35.

[53] Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Roundtable Discussion: The Influence of Feminist Theory on My Theological Work," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7, 1991, 95.

[54] David Tracy, "Roundtable Discussion: The Influence of Feminist Theory in My Theological Work," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7, 1991, 124-5.

[55] John C. Cobb, Jr., "Roundtable Discussion: The Influence of Feminist Theory in My Theological Work," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7, 1991, 109.

As far as our Christian tradition is concerned, feminist provocation is not something tangential or peripheral to theology, rather it affects the fundamentals of theology. Feminism challenges our own ideas about God, cosmos, humanity, relationship, which have been "male-oriented and male-shaped by a patriarchal culture."[57] These ideas have resulted in a distorted understanding of the nature of God and cosmos and humanity and our relationship to God, cosmos and humanity. Feminist discourse is a cogently compelling and uncompromising one that cannot be ignored or evaded by any person who is committed to justice issues, for feminism exposes the injustices suffered by women and by children who depend on their mothers. Hopefully, our patriarchal ideas of God, cosmos and humanity will slowly erode in order that an androgynous and egalitarian understanding of theology will eventually emerge. The appeal of the other does not only happen to Jesus and his disciples, rather to each one of us who follow Jesus in our own way. Like Jesus and his disciples, in many ways, we may have tried to ignore or silence the appeal of the other in our society and church. When I speak of 'we,' I mean those of us whether men or women, who have been accustomed to an patriarchal worldview, that privileges a masculine way of thinking and acting. I would like to underscore both 'thinking' and 'acting' in our discussion because there is always a tendency, which we have inherited from western civilization, a bipolar opposition of thinking from acting. Thinking and acting are inseparably linked together. As we begin to think and reflect our ways, may we also change along our actions and our social structures. Feminist discourses in history generate new ways of constituting and reconstituting our worldview.

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[56] Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, New York: Crossroad, 1992, 40.

[57] Anne McGrew Bennet, "A Feminist Critique of Theology," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 4, 1988, 96.

7. Conclusion

We have shown the feminist struggle against the well-entrenched patriarchy in society. Just like the Syrophoenicean woman, feminists have advanced the struggle of women by wrestling with patriarchy. The woman in her own way was able to hurdle the hindrance by arguing with Jesus who was eventually convinced of the urgency of her need. In this instance, feminists have to struggle from within patriarchy by engaging with men who have been socialized and formed within patriarchal order. They have to present their struggle to men by persuading and convincing then of the merit of their case. Hopefully, men would heed and respond to their appeal. Moreover, feminist struggle is not just against patriarchy but also among women themselves. As we have seen, feminists have been divided on the status of tradition in Christian religion whether they would still adopt it like the Christian feminists did or should reject it like the post-Christian feminists. We have opted for the Christian approach by engaging with the tradition from within but, at the same time, would 'deconstruct' it by inserting and affirming women's experiences.

In this approach, we can adopt what L. Schneider calls 'tensive foundations' between what she calls 'skepticism of the metaphoric exemption' (all constructions are never descriptive of true divinity) and the 'affirmation of experiential confession' (embodied reality claims of women). In this tensive and dynamic confluence, divinity is viewed not as 'either/or' but rather 'both-and.'[58] She explains that in the differences of locations/positions of women, "feminist theologies most coherently support notions of the divine that are suitably open, suitably mobile, suitably multiple."[59] Furthermore, the constructions of divinity remain to be ongoing and unfinished. Hence, at this time of explorations and experimentations, the making of rules of the game can be counterproductive to women because rules set a normative limitation that may constrain the emergence of other diverse and creative possibilities of naming the 'divine power.' "The trick is to keep the two forms of description on dialogue within a system of checks and balances so that one is never privileged at the expense of the other."[60]

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[58] Laurel C. Schneider, *Re-Imaging the Divine: Confronting the Backlash against Feminist Theology*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1998, 19.

[59] Laurel C. Schneider, *Re-Imaging the Divine*, 19.

We have to accept that the tension between Christian and post-Christian feminists is inevitable in the emergence of feminist theology. Considering the various contexts where women are socially located, tension will emerge. This tension bears witness to both the power of differences among women in their experiences of God and of Christ. These women's experiences generate and regenerate other feminist images of God and Christ. They also demonstrate the power of imagination in constructing and reconstructing metaphors in advancing the well-being of women.[61] The tension will probably continue, and its synthesis may never arrive. Yet, the future is always full of possibilities for women. R. Ruether still expects for a Hegelian synthesis in the future that can accommodate both positions.[62] Contrary to R. Ruether, we may expect more proliferation of symbols. The significant moment is that women "know God through communal practices, through physical experiences, through the soaring imaginings of the mind."[63]

The commonality between Christian and post-Christian feminist theologians is the shared conviction that experiences of women throughout history has been debased or denigrated. Thus, feminists are united in the conviction that women have been victimized and dehumanized by patriarchy. Furthermore, they admit the relevance of women's experiences as a resource for doing feminist theology. Thus, the inclusion of women's experiences in theologizing is a way of doing feminist theology. Moreover, they also agree that they need to subvert this patriarchal tradition or history that they have inherited from the Judeo-Christian traditions by offering some subversive texts from feminist perspectives. Feminist reading is a way of subversion because feminists can insert or inject their experiences into the texts. Feminist reading is experience-based narrative which can falsify the dominant masculine reading because feminists 'demystify' any assumed 'universal claim.' In fact, it is not a universal claim at all because it excludes other narratives – the narratives of women's experiences. Furthermore, feminist reading is also 'deconstructive' because it criticizes the 'malestream' discourses and, at the same time, 'reconstructive' because it affirms the potential agency of women.

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[60] Morny Joy, "God and Gender: Some Reflections on Women's Invocations of the Divine" in *Religion and Gender*, Ursula King, ed., Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995, 138.

[61] Heyward, *Saving Jesus*, 15-16.

[62] Ruether, *Disputed Question*, 140.

[63] Rebecca Chopp, "Eve's Knowing: Feminist Theology's Resistance to Malestream Epistemological Frameworks," *Concilium: Feminist Theology in Different Context*, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and M. Shawn Copeland, eds., London: SMC Press & Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996, 122.

After laying their respective positions, we may ask: Can we claim a complete break from tradition? When we look at the works of D. Hampson and P. Christ, they are committed to a radical critique of patriarchy found in the Judeo-Christian traditions. From this critique, they advance their alternative proposal of Goddess religion derived from their personal experiences. This is captured by the metaphor of 'weaving' and 'reweaving' their experiences. They emphasize the weaver and weaving because they are concerned with the 'agency' of women; agency involves an action of doing and acting, or to put it differently, in making a difference; and, at the same time, woman is involved or engaged in the act of weaving and in making a new world. Hence, both person and action are implicated in the imagery of weaving. However, we have to note that the metaphor of weaving has also a patriarchal history. The metaphor of weaving implicates the 'thread' in making a fabric. The thread refers to the materials used in weaving a cloth. During the industrial revolution, the thread is manufactured by the machine in a factory which is dominated by work force of men. In this case, the father is involved in the production of the thread that women use in weaving a fabric. There is a division of labour between men and women in the production of a cloth. However, such division does not necessarily mean that there is equality and partnership in their labour. Thus, there is a need for a thoroughgoing criticism of patriarchy so that it will be eventually neutralized.

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WOMEN AND THE CONCEPT OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Biblical Influences

Irene Muzvidziwa and Victor N. Muzvidziwa◆

1. Introduction

Gender and religion are two critical factors that have a strong influence on people's lives. These two forces have a bearing on various facets of social life including the area of leadership. This paper seeks to examine the gendered nature and religious influences on women's leadership practices in general and specifically on the concept of servant leadership. Several perspectives have emerged in the contemporary period that have come to dominate the field of leadership but one of the central issues of concern in most of these perspectives is the moral imperatives driving the spirit of leadership. Amongst these emerging perspectives with a strong religious fervour is the notion of servant leadership.

It is important to note that the idea of women in leadership is not a new one. The biblical story of creation in the book of Genesis privileges Eve the first women in terms of creation for being a decisive influence on Adam and the subsequent direction of humankind's earthly existence. Both the Old and New Testament have stories of women who played a leadership role in their communities. For instance Deborah in the Book of Judges chapter four was a prophetess and judge. She was a leader of Israel and led by example even in war. Queen Esther in the Book of Esther was an ordinary Jewish woman who through an extra ordinary set of circumstances became Queen of the Persian King Xerxes. Queen Esther's grace, passion, sense of purpose, commitment, faith and willingness to die for her cause won the day for her as a leader at the service of her people. She was indeed prepared to put herself on the line for her people "I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16b). In the book of Acts 9:36 we are told of the story of a disciple named Dorcas in Joppa "who was always doing good and helping the poor." The impact of

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◆**Dr. Irene Muzvidziwa** is the Senior lecturer in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy Discipline, currently lectures at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. **Prof. Victor Ngonidzashe Muzvidziwa** is a Professor of Anthropology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

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her work as a servant leader was demonstrated when she died and all the widows testified that she had made garments and other clothes for them. Through prayer by Peter she was brought back to life. In contemporary times Mother Teresa excelled in her selfless and humanitarian work. She empathised with the less fortunate and had a strong passion to help others. For her, "Love is a fruit in season at all times, and within reach of every hand."[1] Despite becoming a Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 1979 and world famous she remained committed to the spirit of service. What is it that the four women referred to above have in common? They are all servant leaders.

Gender is a concept that is critical to understanding servant leadership. Gender is culture specific and changes over time. Wood observed that gender

> is defined by society and expressed by individuals as they interact with others and media in their society. Further, gender changes over time. We are male or female (sex), but we learn to act in masculine and/or feminine ways (gender). Gender is a social, symbolic construct that varies across cultures, over time within a given culture, over the course of individuals' life spans, and in relation to the other gender.[2]

Examining the relationship between gender, religion and leadership is potentially fruitful. Firstly it can deepen our appreciation of human complexity when it comes to the interplay of cultural influences on men and women's behaviour particularly leadership. It can also serve as a way of unmasking stereotypes that tend to construct leadership in male terms. Secondly studying gender, religion and leadership can contribute towards the development of new insights on leadership perspectives. Thirdly it enriches leadership studies and contributes towards the realisation that the spiritual and moral dimensions of humans is just as important as other dimensions in explaining various social life experiences and practices.

The paper draws on insights gained by the first author from a qualitative study of female primary school principals in one of the provinces in Zimbabwe. Personal experiences of the authors are also used to enrich the discussion in this paper. The second author has been in middle and top university management. The authors also share a strong Christian background which is implicated heavily in servant leadership studies. The next section foregrounds leadership within the realm of feminist critique. This is quite useful to our understanding of the rise and privileging of servant leadership perspective.

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[1] www.saidwhat.co.uk/quotes/m/mother_teresa_707.php November 22, 2004.

[2] J. T. Wood, *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture*, Boston: Wadsworth, 2007, 23.

2. Feminist Critique of Leadership Theory

History is replete with the stories told from exclusive male perspectives and the area of leadership is not an exception. The feminist critique of leadership theory according to Blackmore rests on the assumption that a 'masculinist model has been assumed to portray all experience and hence the universal individual central to this perspective of leadership is modelled upon men's experience.'[3] Enomoto argued that the field of 'leadership is gendered in favour of men,' and further observed that 'to argue that management is a gendered construction is to posit that there is one gender (male) that defines and dominates the discourse in the field of study.'[4] Feminist critics point out how the existing body of organisation and management theory assumes implicitly that managers and workers are male, with male stereotypic powers, attitudes and obligations.[5] While men are portrayed as fitting organisational behaviour, Ford observed that women are associated with the feminine characteristics of caring, nurturing and sharing that are allegedly more appropriate for domestic spheres. In Ford's thinking, charismatic and masculine models of leadership are still featuring in organisational analysis whereby macho, individualistic, assertive and dominant behaviours continue to take precedence over the more feminine qualities.

Enomoto[6] argues that early management theories were developed primarily by men for men giving examples of theories espoused by Taylor, Fayol, Barnard, Simon and Weber who dominated the field. Enomoto challenges the top-down hierarchy of control by identifying a female contributor to management, Mary Parker Follett, whose work in human relations challenged the bureaucratic emphasis established by Taylor and Fayol. On the other hand trait theory privileged traits associated with male leadership.[7] Leadership and management have focused on traits associated with males such as 'strength, toughness and decisiveness.'[8] It has been observed that although the trait theory model of leadership has been denigrated for its failure to differentiate between effective and ineffective male leaders, it has been duly resuscitated as an explanation for why women are not found in leadership positions.[9]

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[3] J. Blackmore, "Educational Leadership and Reconstruction (a Feminist Critique)" in *Critical Perspective on Educational Leadership*, ed. J. Smyth, London: Falmer Press, 1998, 94.

[4] E. K. Enomoto, "Probing Educational Management as Gendered: An Examination through Model and Metaphor," *Teacher's College Record,* 102, 2 (2000), 376.

[5] J. Ford, "Examining Leadership through Critical Feminist Readings," *Journal of Health Organisation and Management*, 19, 3 (2005), 243.

[6] Enomoto, "Probing Educational Management as Gendered," 276.

[7] L. Smulyan, *Balancing Acts: Women Principals at Work*, Albany, New York: New York Press, 2000.

> According to Blackmore's observation women are in a double bind. If a woman displays the culturally defined traits of femininity (being emotional, passive, dependent, nurturing, intuitive or submissive) she is perceived to be a poor leader. If she acts according to the male role definitions of a leader (being aggressive, achievement oriented, self-confident, forceful or competitive) she is condemned as being 'unfeminine.'[10]

Women leaders and feminist researchers[11] perceive the dominant discourse as denying individual differences, ignoring *context,* and giving little or no consideration to the influence of diverse settings within which managers, leaders, and subordinates operated.[12]

Feminist research shows that women who become leaders are increasingly breaking new ground, challenging the stereotype of what women leaders are 'expected' to be and giving value to their own skills; they are giving expressions to their own conceptions of leadership as service to others.[13] Literature shows that women leaders call for 'a reconstruction of a view of leadership which counters the emphasis on individualism, hierarchical relationships, bureaucratic rationality and abstract moral principles.'[14] In Blackmore's view 'leadership looks to empower others rather than have power over others,'[15] an attitude which would constitute a feminist reconstruction of the concept of leadership. These issues are pursued in the next section on servant leadership.

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[8] R. Eisler, "From Domination to Partnership: The Hidden Subtext for Sustainable Change," *Journal of Organisational Change Management*, 7. 4, 1994, 38.

[9] Blackmore, "Educational Leadership and Reconstruction," 100.

[10] Blackmore, "Educational Leadership and Reconstruction," 100.

[11] R. Kark, "The Transformational Leader: Who is (s)he? A Feminist Perspective," *Journal of Organisational Change Management*, 17. 2, 2004, 160-176; C. Shakeshaft, *Women in Educational Administration*, London: Sage, 1987.

[12] Ford, "Examining Leadership through Critical Feminist Readings," 19, 3.

[13] V. Soobrayan, "Gender Neutral leadership: A Myth Nurtured by Leadership," in Drake, P. and Owen, P., eds., *Gender and Management Issues in Education*, Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books 1998, 38.

[14] Blackmore, "Educational Leadership and Reconstruction," 94

[15] Blackmore, "Educational Leadership and Reconstruction," 94.

3. Servant Leadership Theory

This section examines the concept of servant leadership and tries to show how biblical influences have shaped the development of this concept. To some extent the paper tries to deepen and expand our understanding of key concepts such as transformational, authentic, and spiritual leadership. True and genuine leadership is premised on the principle of service to others. The story of the request by the mother of Zebedee's two sons James and John that each of them sit on the left and right in his kingdom cited in Matthew 20: 20-28. The secret to greatness and true leadership lies in Jesus' response, 'Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.' Munroe observes that servant leadership 'is the ultimate form of true leadership and protects the individual from the traps that entangles the power hungry, insecure, unqualified shadows who parade as leaders in many of our communities.' [16] For Munroe servant leadership sums it all, it is:

a. The discovery of one's purpose, gift, and talents and commitment to give them in service to mankind.
b. Being prepared to serve one's gift to the world at every opportunity for the betterment of humanity.
c. Serving oneself to the world.
d. "Self-distribution" to your generation.
e. The maximization of self-manifestation.
f. The pursuit of an inherent vision in order to serve others.[17]

With servant leadership there is no fear, no competition, no comparison, and no jealousy; instead there is greater personal fulfilment, intrinsic motivation, originality, and genuine confidence.

In his review of literature regarding values central to servant leadership Russell[18] draws pertinent attention to the concept as inspired by Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990). Leadership should 'meet the needs of others'[19]and in addition 'motivation for leadership should be a desire to serve.[20] This advances the notion of the servant leader. Russell identified three attributes of a servant leader namely 'trust, appreciation of others, and empowerment.'[21] In discussing the importance of values in each of the identified attributes, Russell indicated that 'trust provides the foundation for people to follow their leaders,' since according to literature, 'the essential values of good leaders include honesty and integrity' – 'values' which 'build interpersonal and organisational trust.' How servant leaders appreciate others, according to Russell, is seen through their facilitation of positive images, by giving love and encouragement, inspiring hope and courage in others and by the application of love in order to transform the workplace into something that is better for everyone. He calls for 'all encompassing love;' that practices patience, kindness and forgiveness in work relations.[22]

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[16] M. Munroe, *The Spirit of Leadership*, New Kensington, Whitaker House, 2005, 100.

[17] Munroe, *The Spirit of Leadership*, 99.

[18] R. F. Russell, "The Role of Values in Servant Leadership," *Leadership and Organisational Development Journal,* 22, 2 (2001), 76-83.

[19] R. K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1977; B. Lloyd, and L. Spears, "A

In Russell's thinking, appreciation of others by servant leaders reflects fundamental personal values that esteem and honour people. Kouzes and Posner[23] similarly identified a shift in focus from self to others among important trends in managerial and leadership values, noting that concern for others – putting their needs and interests as priority – demonstrates empathy and elicits trust. Leaders demonstrate respect and appreciation of others by developing the capacity for listening thus demonstrating an attitude of concern for others. Empowerment – perceived as a central element in excellent leadership – is especially important in servant leadership,[24] entrusting workers with authority and responsibility and emphasises teamwork, reflecting the values of love. 'Servant leaders multiply their leadership by empowering others to lead.'[25] Oster cited by

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New Approach to Leadership," *Leadership and Organisation Development Journal*, 17. 7, 1996, 29-32.

[20] Russell, "The Role of Values in Servant Leadership," 77.

[21] Russell, "The Role of Values in Servant Leadership," 78, 79.

[22] Russell, "The Role of Values in Servant Leadership," 80.

[23] J. Kouzer, and B. Posner, Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI): A Self Assessment and Analysis, San Diego, CA: Pfeiffer & Co., 1993.

[24] D. R. Ebener, and D. J. O'Connel, "How Might Servant Leadership Work? *Management and Leadership*, 20, 3, 2010, 316; G. W. Fairholm, *Perspectives on Leadership: From the Science of Management to Its Spiritual Heart*, Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 1998: P. G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2007; S. T. Rinehart, *Upside Down: The Paradox of Servant Leadership*, Colorado Springs, Co: NavPress, 1998.

[25] C. G. Wilkes, *Jesus on Leadership: Becoming a Servant Leader*, Nashville, TN: Life Ways Press, 1996, 25.

Russell perceived the goal of empowering as creating many leaders at all levels of the organisation and argued that 'empowerment is the opposite of historical management practices that emphasised manipulation.'[26] In this sense servant leadership resemble the notion of distributed leadership.

Keith identified seven key practices by servant leaders.[27] The seven practices involve an increased self-awareness by the servant leaders who recognise their strengths and weaknesses. They surround themselves with people who can fill the gaps in their skills. They are good listeners, enabling them to give thoughtful responses. A servant leader is mission driven and seeks to develop colleagues so that they can grow and become servant leaders too. Servant leaders act as guides, as mentors and coaches to colleagues. The servant leader creates an enabling environment that allows colleagues to use their skills, energy and passion. Lastly effective leaders have foresight of things to come and how to get there.

4. A Brief Look at Women in Leadership

According to Shakeshaft,

> There are scores of great women whose stories lie buried in school historical societies, and in the archives of national organisations. Learning more of their lives may help to shape and understand the knowledge base; at the very least, such research will provide a fuller explanation of the legacy of their early courage and sacrifice.[28]

What Shakeshaft is asking for, in effect, is an alternative discourse on leadership as depicted in Hurty's works. Hurty[29] cites writings by Charlotte Perkins Gilman who argued that the instruction of a child by its mother has been largely neglected in our 'man-made' world where the dominant class views education as that which is organised in formal institutions such as schools and universities and slowly filters downward. For Gilman, 'The mother is the first co-ordinator, legislator, administrator and executive. From the guardian and guidance of her cubs and kittens up to the longer, larger management of human youth, she is the first to consider group interests and correlate them.'[30]

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[26] Russell, "The Role of Values in Servant Leadership," 80.

[27] K. M. Keith, *The Case for Servant Leadership*, Westfield: The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2008.

[28] C. Shakeshaft, *Women in Educational Administration*, London: Sage, 1987, 114.

[29] K. S. Hurty, "Women Principals: Leading with Power" in P. Schmuck and D. Dunlop, eds., *Women Leading in Education,* New York: SUNY, 1995, 399.

[30] C. P. Gilman, *The Man-Made World or Our Androcentric Culture*, New York: Charlton, 1911, 183.

Hurty also draws on the work of Mary Parker Follett to demonstrate a concept of power that was intended for practical, participatory strategising in the business community. Follett devoted her life to the study of how people treat each other. Her theoretical work included studies of human interaction, conflict resolution, and decision-making in organisations. She believed that people grew and changed by talking through conflicts and differences, searching for what each party really wanted. In Hurty's view the groundwork for a process of negotiation that discards the adversarial aspects of collective bargaining in favour of collaborative problem solving is found in Follett's work.[31] Accordingly, 'such processes of negotiation do not rely on traditional notions of power as control or as the domination of decision-making.'[32]

The authenticity and integrity of female experiences, often hidden or missing from the public historical record can be appreciated as contributions to more fully accountable stories of human development. Women in Hurty's study got tired, angry, frustrated, and shared those feelings honestly with their subordinates. It is through the leaders' idealised influence – that is, putting others' needs first and demonstrating high moral standards – that motivated the colleagues to perform beyond their expectations.[33] The concept of synergistic leadership which means working together is a critical aspect of effective leadership.[34] Synergistic thinking in terms of understanding school leadership is important because people work together in administrative meetings, faculty meetings, parent-teacher associations and with the community.

5. Descriptions of Women and Their Approaches

The key to a comprehensive understanding of women principals' lives as servant educational leaders goes beyond just perceptions of their roles. This section highlight descriptions of experiences presented by three women principals selected in the 2003/2004 study. Pseudonyms are used to refer to these women principals. The three women principals had a strong Christian background and attributed their success to God's grace. The information obtained from the interviews conducted is rich and illuminating. In-depth semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were utilised as the data gathering tool.

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[31] M. P. Follett, *The Creative Experience*, New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1924.

[32] Hurty, "Women Principals: Leading with Power," 396.

[33] K. Boehnke, N. Bontis, J. J. Distefano, and A. C. Distefano, "Transformational Leadership: An Examination of Cross-National Differences and Similarities," *Leadership and Organisation Development Journal*, 24. 1, 2003, 6; F. Geijsel, and P. Sleegers, K. Leithwood, and D. Jantzi, "Transformational Leadership Effects on Teachers' Commitment and Effort toward School Reform," *Journal of Educational Administration*, 41. 3, 2003, 228-256.

[34] B. J. Irby, G. Brown, J. A. Duffy, and D. Trautman, "The Synergistic Leadership Theory," *Journal of Educational Administration*, 40. 4, 2002, 304-322.

5.1. Brief Biographical Sketch of Enita

Enita, a widow, is principal of a big primary school in Marondera town, a provincial capital of Mashonaland East Province in Zimbabwe. She completed her O levels in 1972 and worked as an untrained teacher for six years. She completed a three year teacher's training programme in 1980. Six years after training she was appointed deputy head at a small rural school and in 1996 she was promoted to a position of head at the same school on retirement of the male head. Enita noted 'my parents were very poor and I grew up from a very poor background, but anyway, I got my inspiration from my father.' At school she only took interest in drama and public speaking. Enita's mother was very supportive. Her mother had sponsored her father at school. 'My father was accepted at a mission school because of my mother's strong Christian background. I myself am a strong Christian and this has an influence on my leadership.'

5.2. Description of Enita's Leadership

Enita's leadership is relationship-oriented and risk taking. When first promoted, she received a great deal of resistance from the previous acting deputy and the head. She was sidelined from school administration. Enita was promoted to head when the head retired. She experienced fewer problems. She started a garden project, and her story goes:

> Parents were very supportive... We worked well and there was good relationship. The garden project was successful and both the community and the school benefited from it.
>
> ... [W]e used [the money from the garden] for improving the school. We bought textbooks and stationery for the pupils. Other improvements were fencing the school with the fence donated.

She left this school on promotion to head a larger boarding school. Most of the kids at this school were bullies. She observes,

> ... I had to play a mother's role... I managed to reduce the bullying of other kids. What I experienced is 'children need love.' Even if kids make mistakes, 'give them love,' 'that motherly love,' they need it and I had to provide.

Enita created family like groups which were identified as houses for the children. The purpose of these houses was to 'let the pupils have a sense of belonging' and for the teachers easy monitoring and also 'a sense of ownership.' Enita observes, 'both the teachers and the pupils were motivated to improve their houses and there was a big change hence the progress of the school.'

Enita believes in team work and hence she brings in the pupils, community, teachers and parents:

> I see myself as someone who shares power because when you delegate duties you actually are sharing responsibilities and letting somebody be accountable. I see myself as a facilitator, a team builder and also a learner. I am a role model for others.

Enita experienced that a leader needs to be more informed to be able to assist people accordingly: 'Sometimes a teacher comes in crying, my husband took my child from me. You are already a legal advisor. You need to be supportive. You cannot chase her away.'

5.3. Brief Biographical Sketch of Linda

Linda is married, with four children, and is a principal of a small school (farm school) outside Marondera. She completed a teacher's training certificate after form two in 1966. She completed O level studies in 1989. She upgraded her professional qualifications and completed the diploma in teaching in 1992. She got promoted to a deputy head post in 1997. She completed a degree in educational administration in 2000. Linda is the third born in a family of eleven, five girls and six boys. Her father, in her words, 'trained us to be responsible by giving us duties, delegating different responsibilities to each child and rotating the duties.' Linda was once a class monitor, a prefect and a leader at church. She feels that she is a role model for her relatives: 'they look at me as a big aunt with leadership skills.' She always wanted to be a leader who serves people.

5.4. Description of Linda's Leadership

What characterises Linda's communication with her world is the notion of service, challenge and risk taking. For her, being a school head is not easy. Most of the children who come to her school have no parents. They stay with either a guardian or grandparents and have a high incidence of absenteeism. Some children come to school with torn clothes, some barefoot. She feels that it is not worth reprimanding them about the issue since they cannot avoid it. So she asks for assistance from organisations: 'The Red Cross gives us food and money. They promised to give us uniforms.'

She consults and delegates work to teachers. Linda lets everyone work on an area comfortable to them or that they are good at: 'I try to involve all the staff in the discussions on how we can improve the school.' All her teachers are involved in school activities. She noted: 'I lead by example. I make sure I do not divide the teachers. ... They need to be treated as humans!' Linda describes how she treats her colleagues:

> When a teacher comes with a problem …discuss. Assist them. Do not ignore their plight. Assess the problem but before that, first talk to the person. Ask the teacher, what do you think about your problem? If the child is sick ask her, do you want to take your child to hospital? Give them emotional support. Sympathise with the teacher and take into consideration their individual differences. By so doing you are already someone acting like a mother. You are a counsellor. You are a mentor.

When she first arrived, her problems with the community were severe: 'They uprooted the plants and flowers from the school yard and used the school property without permission.' Linda struggled to convince them to change their behaviour: 'It was through continuous dialogue and interaction with them that they came to understand... They now respect the school property. My prayers were answered.'

Linda has her own class to teach: 'when we discuss some of the problems … it's not like I am talking theory.' She uses the work plan from the Education Office as a guide from which she makes her master plan: 'I … discuss the work plan with teachers.' Linda sees communication as twofold: 'we interact, I delegate power.' Linda stresses: 'you should have a shared vision, create a good climate and good tone of the school.' She observes that teachers should feel included and have a sense of ownership. Linda feels satisfied with the progress she has made at the school and in her working environment.

5.5. Brief Biographical Sketch of Shelly

Shelly is a head-teacher of a big school in Marondera town, Mashonaland East Province in Zimbabwe. She completed a certificate at a teacher's training college in 1978 and started teaching in 1979. She has never been married but had two dependents – her daughter and her child. In 1989, she was promoted to the post of deputy head one. She had obtained a degree in educational administration. Her leadership has been influenced by the knowledge she got from the administration degree programme and her personal experiences as a teacher and an educational leader.

5.6. Description of Shelly's Leadership

What characterises Shelly's leadership is a life of service and ability to involve others in decision making. Shelley received a warm welcome at her first school as deputy head. Shelly's major turning point emerged when she transferred from this school.

Shelly applied for a lateral transfer. She became a head of a smaller school. Shelly thought that the only challenge would be of decision-making. There was no hand-over take-over: She had this to say,

> Everything was in shambles. The school was dysfunctional everything in disorder. The water taps were locked, electricity disconnected and the buildings were falling... I worked very hard. The responsible authority was very supportive … the water was unlocked and the electricity reconnected.

There were no financial records. Shelly asked for permission from the responsible authority to start her own new records and was authorised. Children at this school came from surrounding farms. They were not contributing anything to the school including paying fees. Shelly tried to find out what exactly was happening: 'I … talked to the farm owner first being the owner of the school, I then moved on to farmers surrounding the school.' The first time Shelly approached farmers she talked to them individually. She then called parents to a meeting.

Both the farmers and the parents indicated that there was no communication with the school, and that things were not transparent that was why they were quiet and not supportive. From there Shelly communicated: 'I involved the 'feeder farmers' (the surrounding farm owners) and the parents.' Parents were taking the children to work in the farm fields leading to frequent absenting of children from school and some were baby-sitting while parents go to work:

> I had to approach the farmers again to discuss the issue of child labour ... I … planned to introduce a pre-school to cater for the under five so that this could solve the issue of baby-sitting.

She approached the farmers and they agreed. The school used to have 'hot sitting' i.e. double session a morning and an afternoon session, because there were not enough classes. When she left the school after three years, the school had built enough classrooms and there was no more 'hot sitting.' She left for a head grade one post at an urban larger school.

Shelly says regarding headship:

> It needs patience … sometimes … calm... I discovered that the role needs transparency and talking to people. The more people

> understand what is going on, the more they become supportive. Since becoming head now I pray every day and God is with me and answers my prayers.

Shelly sees openness and frankness as important aspects that contribute to her progress as head. When Shelly makes proposals for projects, she involves teachers. She incorporates their ideas and learns from them. Teachers feel free to discuss personal problems:

> Sometimes teachers come and close the door to discuss their personal problems. A mother comes in and sit down and tells me what exactly the problem she is encountering. Sometimes I feel that the respect I get is due to the motherly role that I offer... I do mentoring and counselling.

She feels she is someone who is caring, and able

> to create an environment that is welcoming. I need to understand the people whom I work with …to know how to handle their problems ... I also feel I am a role model there to serve the people.

6. The Way Women Lead

There is need to disseminate information on women role models' experiences, especially in the field of educational leadership. Enita, Linda and Shelley all worked hard as school principals to improve the situations within their schools. They adopted the role of the servant leader who makes great sacrifices for the good of the people one serves. By listening to people's problems and empathising with them, the women sacrificed their time which reflects the biblical concepts of sacrifice and of giving, for it is not only tangibles in the form of material and financial means that one can offer for the Lord. Informal counselling occurred in the process of listening thus fulfilling Paul's message to the Galatians "carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ" (6:2-3). They adopted an interactive approach to leadership which in turn opened up opportunities for colleagues to develop and become leaders. Paul encouraged Jesus' followers to lead by example and evangelise followers to preach the word thus embracing the principles of distributing leadership. This is what Enita, Linda and Shelley did. They were interested in serving people 'instead of being focused on controlling events and people, retaining power, the principal needs to share power.'[35] Allowing people to participate in decision-making does enhance the smooth running of the school.[36] The women recognised that the school is a unit in which everyone is an expert in something, and as a member within the school community each person's contribution was valued. Servant leaders appreciate Paul's concept of 'one body, many parts'. Women find it easier to embrace servant leadership as it connects well with their everyday lived experiences. Most women live a life of service to their male counterparts and within the strictures of the family environment. Women are socialised to work hard, to be submissive and respectful and not to be in the driver's seat. It is therefore much easier for women to adopt and successfully negotiate their leadership roles as servant leaders. This particularly feminine quality proves to be a useful tool to women school heads.

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[35] M. Crogan, and S. Roberson, "Developing a New Generation of Educational Leaders by Capitalising on Partnerships," *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 16. 7, 2002, 314.

The experiences of the women principals reflect a concern with shared decision making.[37] Some of the benefits of shared decision making include, (a) creation of a pool of knowledge, which meant that better decisions tended to be made because ideas came from different people with different experiences; (b) possession of different perspectives so that individuals with varied experience and interests help the group to see problems from different angles, and hence bring more alternative solutions; (c) greater understanding of the purpose behind decisions; (d) a sense of ownership and increased acceptance of decisions by the group. While servant leaders tend to share experiences with others and although it can be acknowledged that the concept can be applied even by male leaders, the issue of gender neutrality is quite contested especially in the field of educational leadership. Gender is a social construct, and the argument that Taylor's concept of scientific management and the trait theory privileged traits associated with males situates the males in a less comfortable zone as far as servant leadership is concerned. The notion of influence drives effective and successful leadership.[38] Thus although servant leadership is uniquely Christian, data show that its Biblical influence seems to have more positive impact on females than with males due to the structures and practices of organisational life. Although information sharing and the empathetic engagement with school community members led to the success story of Enita, Linda and Shelley, this was done in the framework of servant leadership. Servant leadership reflect and privilege the feminine attributes of caring and nurturing that for some are perceived as weakness, but for our women leaders this is what drives their success. The women did not separate themselves from those they led. Enita emphasised love, nurturance and playing the motherly role. Linda offers emotional support to teachers and pupils. Shelley listens with an empathetic ear and heart. Enita, Linda and Shelley adopt what Laible[39] calls a loving epistemology and an ethic of care in their life. A loving epistemology enables us to travel to other worlds. Travel implies both reaching out and connecting with others and also doing a self introspection of one's strengths and weaknesses. It is a way of coming to know one-self as well as others. Life is a journey in which we must reach out to others in order to come to a holistic and more informed understanding of others as well as oneself. Liable observes that "travelling to some one's world is a way of identifying with them because by travelling to their worlds we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes."[40] The idea of travel is well captured in the life of Jesus as depicted in the Gospels. Jesus travelling as he embraced and reached out to the marginalised and everybody. To some extend this is the story of the women discussed in this article.

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[36] F. O. Walumbwa, C. Wu, and L. A. Ojode, "Gender and Instructional Outcomes: The Mediating Role of Leadership Style," *Journal of Management and Development*, 23. 2, 2004, 124-140.

[37] R. Kreitner, *Management*, 2nd ed., London: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983.

[38] D. R. Ebener, and D. J. O'Connell, "How Might Servant Leadership Work?" *Management and Leadership*, 20. 3, 2010, 316.

The women principals cited above believed in dialogue to settle organisational issues and applied Paul's teachings to the Ephesians 4:26-27, that one should not hold on to anger and should not give the devil a chance in one's life. True love is seen by one's ability to embrace forgiveness. The women heads at some stage had been rejected and wronged by those in authority, they did not allow this to derail them from doing a good job in their schools. They were soldiers out to succeed in their schools. Not only did Enita, Linda and Shelley coach and mentor colleagues, they also inspired them. This is the hallmark of servant leadership. Listening and offering non-judgmental support are seen as key to successful servant leadership strategies. Mentoring can also be seen as counselling, as it gives room for a colleague to interact, thereby enabling him or her to see things from a positive perspective.[41]

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[39] J. C. Laible, "A Loving Epistemology: What I Hold Critical in My Life, Faith and Profession," *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13. 6, 2000, 693-698.

[40] J. C. Laible, "A Loving Epistemology," 691.

7. Conclusion

The paper has shown a strong link between gender, religion and leadership. Successful and effective leadership in schools is linked to the adoption of servant leadership. When school leaders lead from behind as people's servants they are more likely to attain the organisational mission. Leadership also entails an element of service and sacrifice and strong commitment to the well being of others. Servant leadership as depicted by Enita, Linda and Shelley has a moral basis as it embraces an ethic of care and love. While it is clear that motherly love applied by women generated in them a strong sense of community partnership and caring, the notion of servant leadership if taken seriously and applied in schools would be successful irrespective of gender. The women principals discussed in this paper had a strong inclination to act as facilitators in their schools; they put a premium on relationships hence their emphasis on teamwork; they were prepared to learn and were open minded; they were less judgemental in their approach and had a strong spiritual orientation; and their leadership was underpinned by Christian values. It appears that the story of the three women school leaders discussed in this article confirm Cheung and Halpern[42] and Eagly and Carli's[43] observation that successful women leaders do lead differently from men. Successful women leaders embraced more democratic, participative, teamwork, relational and empathetic styles. It is also heartening to note that current thinking of leadership is shifting from rigid to flexible approaches and is beginning to embrace some aspects of gendered servant leadership.

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[41] K. Pocklington, and D. Weindling, "Promoting Reflection on Headship through the Mentoring Mirror," *Educational Management and Administration*, 24. 2, 1996, 175-191.

[42] F. M. Cheung, and D. F. Halpern, "Women at the Top: Powerful Leaders Define Success as Work + Family in a Culture of Gender," *American Psychologist*, 65. 3, 2010, 182-193.

[43] A. H. Eagly and L. L. Carli, *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth about How Women Become Leaders*, Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2007.

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A NAME OF OUR OWN

Subaltern Women's Perspectives on Gender and Religion

Cynthia Stephen◆

1. Introduction

Even early in human social organization, women had primacy of place in the religious consciousness and practice. Their role as progenitors and mothers – giving birth and nurture, as producers and gatherers – cooking, weaving, livestock rearing, and as early agriculturists and horticulturists clearly gave them an edge as functioning parts of human society. At a time when there was only a rudimentary understanding of reproduction the fact that women gave birth and nurtured the babies perhaps engendered a sense of awe. Thus religious practice in almost every primitive community has women in important roles – as priestesses, even objects of worship. The fertility cults, of course, celebrate women and their fertility.

As societies evolved and patriarchal practice gained ascendancy, it was accompanied by a shift, a degradation, of the role of women in society, and inevitably, in religion. From the female principle being celebrated and worshipped, events resulted in the delegitimizing the role of women in religious practice. Men took over the priestly roles, and women barred from even entering the "holy" places, far from officiating as priests. The dual stereotyping of woman based on male fears and fantasies entered the popular imagination and thence into societal organizations, including literature, religion, myth and art: the idealised pure, vestal virgin, the ideal chaste mother figure on the one hand and the wicked, sexually aware and active woman, chiefly interested in entrapping foolish men through arousing lustful thoughts and behaviour. Thus, woman as a class was thrust from the pedestal and brought down to the earth.

◆**Dr. Cynthia Stephen** is an independent researcher, writer and activist, working on issues of gender, poverty, marginalisation, dalits and Christian studies. She has published a number of articles in magazines, newspapers, journals and edited volumes on these issues. She is also active in lobbying and advocacy on these concerns, and is a well-known trainer and theorist on gender and dalit women and girls. Her doctoral work is on the political empowerment of dalit women in Karnataka, India.

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2. Woman in Indian Religious Traditions

As religions developed across various civilizations, whether western or Asian ones, a similar pattern is evident. Even in agnostic Indian religions such as Jainism and Buddhism, the main points of debate centred on the issue of women. Jainism split in the first century into two sections, the *Digambaras* and the *Swetambaras* on the question of whether it was possible for a soul clad in a female body to attain nirvana.[1] Buddhism faced a major crisis during the lifespan of the Buddha himself when large numbers of women wanted to join the *Sanghas* as celibates. The issue was finally resolved when he permitted them to organize themselves into congregations of nuns, with the proviso that they had to submit to the leadership of a senior monk.

K. G. Gurumurthy[2] in his anthropological study of the Renuka-Yallamma tradition shows how Brahminism's conquest of the indigenous religions – which are basically either animistic, monotheist, or from the Mother Goddess tradition began with remaking the myth of the Mother Goddess, dethroning the reigning deity through implying loss of health and/or fertility and supplanting her with a male mentor who reigns in her place. The Devadasi or Jogini who had ritual status now loses it and becomes an adjunct of the male Tanika – head of the sacred centre who now takes over the ritual roles and becomes the mentor of the Devadasis, who are bound to take instructions from him, obey him, and even offer him the ritual offerings she receives. Thus, the religious establishment, allying with the political powers of the locality, grabs leadership of the local religious power centre and through this takes control of the rites, rituals, offerings and thereby the economic surplus of the people of the area.[3] As the people depend on the temple's oracle for their basic life decisions, their behaviour and social practices are also powerfully influenced by those in charge of the sacred centre. The subaltern religious traditions thus fall under the total sway of the Brahminical forces with little hope of change. The most that the subaltern traditions can hope for is to maintain a foothold in the periphery of the practices, though not within the canonically approved (read Sanskritised) 'traditions' now practiced in the temple.

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[1] Cynthia Stephen, "Social History of India, in J. B. Santiago and P. Theagarajan, eds., *Early Christianity in India with Parallel Developments in Other Parts of Asia*, Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 2009.

[2] K. G. Gurumurthy, *Religion and Politics*, trans. A. A. Mutalik-Desai, Athani: Vimochana Prakashana, 2005.

[3] Gurumurthy, *Religion and Politics*, 66-74.

3. Liberation Struggles of Women and Blacks in the 20th Century

The 20th century saw a number of developments in the philosophical sphere which had their reverberations in the political sphere as well. While the European Enlightenment sowed the seeds of Human Rights consciousness, the end of Colonialism and the executive Monarchy, it had mixed results. Nietzsche proclaiming the demise of the Divine gave impetus to the rise of powerful forces of Secularism in Europe, which in turn caused the weakening of a strong socio-political factor – call it Faith, Religious Belief or the Church – operating on the European continent. This gradually paved the way for pragmatist philosophies which eventually resulted in huge aberrations such as the nations of Germany and Italy coming under the thraldom of Fascism,[4] and which finally required the Second World War to bring it to an end.

Struggles of oppressed communities such as the blacks in South Africa and the Peasants in Central and South America for justice and liberation found resonance around the world. While students of political science and history may be aware of the role of religion in these struggles, it is otherwise not known that the philosophical core of these struggles had roots in Religion. While the Blacks in South Africa and the United States used their own interpretation of the Bible and drew liberative meanings from the stories of the Jewish nation in the Old Testament and the life and mission of Jesus in the New Testament, they became the creators of a new theological stream which came to be known as Black Theology. The rejection, oppression, repression and injustice recorded in the Bible came alive to them and they found a powerful source of faith, belief and political mobilization through their internalization of the liberative content in the Bible. Thus was born the US Civil Liberties movement of the 60s, with the charismatic leadership and the martyrdom of the Rev. Martin Luther King.

The Apartheid Movement in South Africa was also led by Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu of the Reformed Church, with the ardent support of a number of church and civil rights groups from around the world. But even as the radical message of the Bible was uncovered by its re-reading by the subaltern communities – the blacks both in the US and South Africa, the women in these communities – especially the black women, who played a very focal role in church and community leadership for historical reasons – found that these movements actually continued to reflect the patriarchal norms prevalent in wider society. The content of their lives and experience were not mainstreamed in these movements.

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[4] These ideas are discussed in Francis Scheaffer, *Corruption vs. True Spirituality*, Reissued (self published) as a composite work by Vishal Mangalwadi, with an annexure by him, in 1998. See http://francisschaefferstudies.org/francis-schaeffer-studies/schaeffer_books.php?book_title=Corruption-Vs.-True-Spirituality&PHPSESSID=5bc9116123c6866083cf9e1016886230

The entire continent of Latin America was in turmoil with the struggle between the feudal political forces and the indigenous population. The struggle was the crucible in which was born one of the most influential ideologies of the twentieth century, again birthed by a priest, Paulo Freiere, who wrote the little book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" in the 1970s[5] which ushered in a totally new method of understanding the knowledge and wisdom of the common people. It had a major impact in subverting the transmission of dominant knowledge, through the strategy of 'raising the critical consciousness,' also known as 'conscientisation,' awakening the consciousness of the people which had been made dormant by the dominant ideology that enslaved the individual and the community.

This method privileges people's knowledge and experience over that of the received knowledge of the dominant groups. These developments spread rapidly throughout Latin America and the rest of the world, and had a lasting impact on the identity and belief systems of the dominated or subaltern groups. In Latin America, Liberation Theologians were able to use these techniques to mount a successful siege on the sources of domination, the feudal class aided and abetted by religious institutions, including the Church (which played a key role in legitimising the oppressive structures), which had kept millions of Hispanic community in poverty and exploited their land, cultures and social systems, and delegitimized their indigenous forms of faith and belief. Their work, including the 'conscientisation' resulting from the application of Freire's pedagogy, had a huge impact on the lives of the common people and empowered them in many unexpected ways.

The outcome of all these social and political upheavals of the 1970 and 80s triggered veritable 'earthquakes' in the academic sphere. These reverberated through the universities, and important advances such as the work of Edward Said, with his powerful critique of Colonialism; Foucault, Derrida, Noam Chomsky and other post-modernist thinkers had a very fundamental impact on the academy and also specifically the seminary.

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[5] *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, first Published in Portuguese in 1968, was translated into English in 1970, and went into 30 editions (New York: Continuum Books, 2006). It was banned during the 1970s and 80s, but illegal copies were circulated in South Africa during the anti-apartheid struggle.

4. Women Come into Their Own in the Academy[6]

Feminism has evolved over three waves – the first wave, led by such stalwarts as Mary Wollstonecraft, struggled for the right to vote, access to education and equal rights. The struggles of women for self-determination and full citizenship in the shape of the vote and access to education and employment continued to break fresh ground in the post-colonial and post modernist schools, in the Second Wave of Feminism. The academy and the seminary, till then the citadel of white male privilege, was breached by these developments. Consequently, a number of Universities and training institutions in the US, in keeping with the American policy of promoting diversity, made special efforts to promote research into various aspects of life of women, including women of colour. An "enabling environment" including a favourable and receptive academic climate and resources was created. Funding for training leaders – including women from diverse backgrounds – black, Hispanic, and 'Third World' also became available. This contributed to a rich flowering of research, writing and discourse in these areas as women from these hitherto relatively silent sections began to gain spaces and voice in the public discourse. Thus one notices an explosion of publications and creative production from these sections in the academic discourse. The silenced women had found their voices, and they found that they were finally being heard, and there is a visible and sudden flowering of thought, and creativity. They articulate, in their own ways, their struggle for liberation. They realize the need to assert not just difference and particularity of identity but also a particularity of cultural and existential reality. Women theologians and scholars in the US and Latin America found the need for a new name, of the need to be 'called by a new name.'

On a Personal-'Communal' Note, I had been instinctively uncomfortable with defining myself as a feminist but never understood why for a long time. Part of the answer came as described in a personal narrative which has been published earlier on a website[7] – it may have been an instinctive rejection of the feminism shaped by a dominant ethos. Perhaps it was an intuitive need for an "ism" based on a more personalised consciousness. Maybe I too was looking for a name that would include the experiences of the Dalit women themselves, their experiences of suffering, exclusion and *thrice-removedness* – isolation by virtue of gender, caste, and class – not to speak of religion, if one were a Muslim or a Christian Dalit. I then came across the term womanism, applied by black feminists, used in a way that may be seen as tangential to feminism.[8] Imagine my excitement and joy to find that the same experience is mirrored in the life of Hispanic and Black women, who also struggle to find a word to define themselves! I now feel that this term is a more appropriate term to use, though it is not very well-known in India given the upper caste-class biases that tend to define the discipline of Women's Studies in India and which has also appropriated the discursive space offered by the term Third World Feminism.

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[6] This section is drawn from, and builds upon my article "Liberative Ideologies and the Indian Church in the 21st Century," *People's Reporter*, May 2010.

[7] "Feminism and Dalit Women in India," http://www.countercurrents.org/stephen 161109.htm

The Dalit Womanist paradigm will be invested with its own meanings from its own political and geographical location, just as Black/African womanism is imbued with its own meaning. Dalit womanism will be broad enough to include the experience not only of the Dalit women in general, but also sensitive enough to provide space for the expression of the diversity of the experiences of religious minorities, tribal and ethnic identities who are presently termed subaltern. Once the process begins, there can be no stopping it. It will not only build and shape theory, but also learn to mediate the spaces and build solidarity between itself and the existing Feminist and Womanist thought and theory. It will also negotiate its differences with and build solidarity with men from Dalit and other subaltern and marginalised groups. The imperative will not be lost on anyone who can see the changing paradigms of society from a Patriarchy-dominated ethos towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

To back-track a little, trained theologians among black women began to articulate their own experiences and soon came out with a term – Black womanist Theology. The term *Womanist* was coined by Alice Walker, a black woman writer who defined it to differentiate it from the term *Feminist.*[9] Delores Williams, Associate Professor of Theology and Culture at United Theological Seminary, New York, wrote in 1978: "Womanist theology, a vision in its infancy, is emerging among Afro-American Christian women. Ultimately many sources – biblical, theological, ecclesiastical, social, anthropological, economic, and material from other religious traditions – will inform the development of this theology."[10] A womanist is a black feminist or feminist of colour.

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[8] I first heard this term from my good friend Prof. Evangeline Rajkumar of United Theological College, Bangalore, and then coined the term Dalit Womanism, with which I immediately felt more comfortable.

[9] Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, New York: Harcourt, 2003. Also, according to Delores Williams, "The concept of womanist allows women to claim their roots in black history, religion and culture, [A] womanist is also "responsible, in charge, serious." She can walk to Canada and take others with her. She loves, she is committed, she is a universalist by temperament. Her universality includes loving men and woman, sexually or nonsexually. She loves music, dance, the spirit, food and roundness, struggle, and she loves herself." "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices," *Christianity and Crisis*, March 2, 1987.

Around the same time the Hispanic women also were finding that their own experiences in the church in Latin America and the US did not get reflected in the life of the churches they were a part of. While Hispanic women generally agreed with the idea that sexism was a negative force among the Hispanics, which further strengthens the dominant forces of society, thus helping to repress and exploit them thus contributing to their widespread poverty. And despite forming the vast majority of the faithful in the churches, they do not have any role in any of its decisions. Their understanding of the God to whom everyone prays is ignored. According to Ada Maria Asisi-Dias,

> Therefore Hispanic women continue to search for a name that will call us together, that will help us to understand our oppression, that will identify the specificity of our struggle without separating us from our communities...To be able to name oneself is one of the most powerful abilities a person can have. A name is not just a word by which one is identified. A name provides the conceptual framework and the mental constructs that are used in thinking, understanding and relating to a person. For almost 15 years, Hispanic women in the U.S. who struggle against ethnic prejudice, sexism, and in many cases classism have been at a loss as to what to call ourselves.[11]

She continues her search and finds that one common term is used in literature and song – *mujer* (woman). Thus, she says, those who make a preferential option for *mujeres* are *mujeristas,* just as the black feminists who struggled earlier chose to called themselves "womanist."

5. Indian Scenario: Caste, Class and the Nationalist Movement

To bring the argument into its Indian context, one needs to point out the essential commonalities as well as the differences in the situations of the oppressed in their struggles for liberation across the globe. It is too well known to recount that Indian society is ridden, as no other, with the canker of casteism. Caste is essentially a pernicious system of social organization which institutionalizes hierarchy, and values individuals and communities on the basis of accidents of birth, assigning a large section to social, economic, political and religious marginalization, and gives inordinate power, pelf and privilege to a relatively tiny number of communities and individuals. Needless to say, the system, which is justified through religion, tradition and scripture, is most discriminatory, and women as a whole are totally negated as individuals. Their only identity is through their relation to a male in their biological family – as daughter, sister, wife or mother.

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[10] Williams, "Womanist Theology: Black women's Voices," *Christianity and Crisis*, March 2, 1987.

[11] Asisi-Dias, "Mujeristas: A Name of Our Own," *Christian Century*, May 24-31, 1989, 560.

It was Jotirao Phule, and his wife Savitribai, who struck the first blow for liberation and justice of the oppressed masses in modern times.[12] Phule, as a young student from a backward class community, was strongly influenced by his teachers and his reading of Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man.*[13] He was the first to publish critiques in his mother tongue Marathi, of the ways in which the Brahmins – the powerful Peshwas of Maharashtra – oppressed and exploited in every way the common hardworking peasants and workers of the country. He taught his wife to read, trained her to teach, and eventually the couple started a number of schools for girls, ran an orphanage, organized the first civil marriage in the country, and set up a discussion group called the Satya Shodhak Samaj, with the objective of interrogating the unjust practices of the day. He lobbied the colonial government to run day schools for common people's children – meaning the majority of non-Brahmin castes – so that all could access education and benefit from it: employment, modern thought and liberation. He was the inspiration for the life and work of the eminent economist, lawyer, thinker, political leader and finally, spiritual head of the oppressed Indian masses, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who championed the cause of women as a large section of the oppressed in the country. He addressed their issues specifically in his writings, and built up their leadership in the trade union he set up. He drafted a secular Constitution with women getting equal rights, freedom and non-discrimination as citizens. After independence, in his capacity as Law minister, he also drafted a far-sighted Bill giving women the Right to Property, which the Hindu Personal Law denied at the time. When he faced fierce attacks on this count, and the PM Jawaharlal Nehru did not back him, he resigned from the Cabinet in protest.

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[12] Braj Ranjan Mani, *A Forgotten Liberator: The Life and Struggle of Savitribai Phule*, New Delhi: Mountain Peak, 2009, 5.

[13] Mani, *A Forgotten Liberator*, 5.

The anti-colonial struggle was, however, one of the rare modern contexts in India in which women were seen in public roles, as freedom fighters and leaders of popular struggles. Gandhiji clearly articulated the need for women to be fully involved in the struggles and this legitimized their role. Women were also active participants in the struggles of the depressed[14] class for voice and representation led by Ambedkar. Women were closely involved in the Indian National Army set up by Subhas Chandra Bose, the Telangana Movement, and other struggles against the British by the tribal communities in Central India. Women from the lower socio-economic classes in Southern India had joined the ranks of the educated and started working as teachers, nurses, and paramedics.

6. Post-Independent India and Indian Feminism

The overall situation of women in society, however, fell back into subservience and subordination in the post independent India, as was the norm following periods of political turmoil and struggle – just as happened in the West following the Second World War, due to the entrenched patriarchal norms which still keep the women as outsiders to political power and decision-making. It was only when the civil liberties movements and the third wave of Feminism hit the world that women in India began to mobilize around their issues – the 1970s. Since then, there has been a fairly large mobilization of women especially of middleclass urban women, who have notched up quite impressive success in struggles for legal reform, against gender violence, etc. The question remains, however, as to whether the Indian Feminist movement truly made a difference to the largest numbers of women in India? To answer this it is necessary to undertake a critical review of the role of the Feminist movements in this context.

Feminism in India, with its liberal and left-oriented value base, has over the years continued to marginalize Dalit Women's lives and experiences from theorizing and actions. It may even be said that the women's movement in India is in the grip of the Brahminical and casteist consciousness which totally obscures the role of caste oppression in the lives of the mass of underprivileged women in India.[15]

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[14] The term Depressed Classes was the official term in use at the time, to denote the groups who faced traditional impediments to their human and citizenship rights.

[15] For a detailed treatment of the subject, see Cynthia Stephen, "India, the Idea of Nation and the Subaltern Indian Woman," *Integral Liberation*, vol. 15. 2, June 2011, 161-172.

One important illustration is the almost total lack of response from the mainstream women's movements to the most blatant atrocities like public rapes, lynching and discriminations that Dalit women face – for instance, the horrendous Khairlanji case where two dalit women – a mother and daughter – were brutally killed in public, and where no action was taken till several days later street demonstrations and violence by youths from mostly the dalit community finally forced the police to register cases and take up investigation. The submission by the Christian Solidarity Worldwide to the Universal Periodic Review of the UN asserts that caste-based analysis of the various contemporary forms of slavery show that the chief victims of human trafficking, sexual slavery, the Devadasi system, bonded labour and manual scavenging are Dalits, especially women. The UN Committee on the Status of Women noted that the implementation of laws to prevent such exploitation is extremely poor.[16]

Contrast that with the strong demonstrations and legal challenges and resources the women's groups devote to issues relating to domestic violence in middleclass homes, or rights of alternate sexualities, or for struggles to licence prostitution.[17] According to Vibhuti Patil, eminent economist and women's rights activist, the women's movement in Maharashtra has undergone a huge split on the issues of the subaltern women. The mainstream feminists choose to articulate and work on issues such as domestic violence, reproductive rights, alternate sexualities, the assertion of the right of women to continue on sex work and struggle for their rights; the women and activists from the Dalit and Bahujan groups question this priority and assert that the real issues is of discrimination, caste-based gender violence against Dalit women and girls including the structural discrimination which imposes sex work, manual scavenging and low-paid "unclean" occupations on them by the collusion of caste, class and patriarchal hierarchies. It is even more significant that the cases taken up by the mainstream women's groups are indeed reviewed and addressed sympathetically by courts, thus underscoring the fact that the class-caste-patriarchal alliances are more comfortable with addressing issues seen as coming from "safe" quarters.

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[16] From the summary prepared by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN, New York, March 2008.

[17] It is left to Dalit organizations to raise these issues in international forums, while mainstream women's groups focus on the above issues. For instance, the issue of the state's failure to protect the rights of women in prostitution and sex work is raised by the Gramin Mahila Sanstha and VAMP.

In contrast, the lack of access of Dalits to justice is widely known even internationally – as the numerous recommendations and comments by the bilateral and multilateral bodies show – and continues unchecked even in the face of the blatantly casteist and anarchist violations commonly seen all over India. These include targeted rapes and atrocities against educated and newly-assertive Dalit communities, social and economic boycotts, ongoing untouchability practices in the public and private realms, exclusion from certain occupations, and reserving certain low-paid and unclean occupations for Dalits; extraction of caste labour on pain of violence and displacement. The conviction rate, even under the low number of cases which come up for trial under the special Laws drafted in their favour, is woeful, even going by the National Crime Records data.[18] Further, in the cases of Dalits, the caste factor is sought to be downplayed, and the issue addressed as a 'mere' law-and-order problem. For instance, in the Khairlanji case, the judgement only gave relief for the murders, and chose to disregard the caste angle. In the notorious Kambalapalli case, even though seven Dalits from the household of a panchayat waterman who was a Dalit – were burnt alive in a public lynching, all the accused were acquitted for lack of evidence as the witnesses had all been intimidated by the powerful perpetrators into not testifying.

Thus both civil society and the courts have placed the issues of Dalits at a much lower priority despite their intensity and the fact that they are duty bound by the Constitution to prevent and deter anti-Dalit crimes. The situation reflects the caste and class bias of influential sections of Indian society – the police, courts, the government. But even civil society, especially the mainstream Women's movement, has chosen to down-play these blatant structural violations faced by Dalits. In other words, they have failed to take these issues on board, even as they are most articulate on issues such as communal violence, violence against the Maoists, etc. It is also interesting that most of the women who head feminist organisations come from privileged class and caste background. Their social location obviously dictates their choice of issues and approach. Thus Dalit women's concerns which include wages, water, housing, food security, violence from males of other castes in addition to their own, child marriage practices (with all its attendant social and health complications) due to high possibility of sexual violence against girls, etc – are fairly low on their priorities.

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[18] http://www.ncdhr.org.in/media-library/media-library/?searchterm=Atrocities

In contrast, feminists are quick to take up issues relating to the sexual economy, such as reproductive rights which include "choice" to abort, even the outlawed sex-selective abortion is being touted as the "right of a woman to choose what child to bear;" the "right" of women in sex work to remain in it, protection for them and legalisation of sex work, etc. In Mumbai, the issue was brought to a head by the Bar Girls Controversy about four years ago. A police officer, who happened to be a Dalit, passed an order banning the use of girls to dance in bars. This caused a huge uproar and issues were polarised as women from the elite groups rose up in support of the bar girls who lost their means of livelihood; the women from the Dalit and Bahujan movements spoke up in favour of the decision as they felt that the system targeted girls from their sections for such work which they felt was sexual slavery and degraded women especially from the subaltern groups. Further, they felt that the system therefore privileged the women of the elite class and castes who wanted women from Dalit and other subaltern groups to provide basically illicit sexual services to men at huge personal cost while they benefitted by exercising choice of profession, and also were able to maintain their own legal, social and health status at an increasingly high level.

Thus, it is clear that mainstream, elite Indian Feminism has huge gaps in the way it chooses its issues, its strategy and reach. As a result, one may conclude that their real intention of liberation for all women everywhere is tainted by class-caste-self interest.

On the other hand, the work of strugglers for liberation like Freiere, Gramsci, Martin Luther King, Bishop Desmont Tutu, Nelson and Winnie Mandela have influenced grassroots-level interventions by the 'action groups' of the 80s and the NGOs and people's movements of the 90s and onward. Therefore, the tools of liberative movements of people if not all of its radical content, have been in use in India for decades, often by theologically trained activists who in turn used these ideas to train and mobilise the masses.

7. Dalits, Women and the Church in India

According to Dr. John Dayal, a journalist and activist, the Indian Church comprises of 70% Dalit and Adivasi, the majority of whom continue to be poor, oppressed, and excluded, even in the church. But due to the search for liberation and hope that impels the oppressed to various options, the church continues to grow in numerical terms. According to Godwin Shiri, the Christian Dalits have not lost hope in the liberative potential of

Christianity.[19] One of the important manifestations of this search for fulfilment by the Dalits in Christianity has been the development of Dalit Theology from the 80s onwards. This field of study has seen rapid growth and development, with many thinkers, writers and practitioners in this field bringing in fresh and well-grounded perspectives which have challenged existing biases and set new benchmarks of authenticity and rigour. Rev. Nirmal, Rev. Devasagayam, and Rev. James Massey were among the pioneers, and several younger scholars have enriched the field immensely as well.

However, just as Black women found that Black theology tended to be as gendered as mainstream theology, Dalit women were marginalized in the development of Dalit Theology. Even the articulations by Dalit men of the female-centred value base of the Dalit consciousness were made from a male perspective, it was felt. Women theologians from a Dalit background such as Prasanna Kumari, Martha Gladstone, and Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar and many others have written and spoken extensively on this subject.

The situation of the women of this group, both Dalit and Adivasi, but especially Dalit, is more problematic, as it appears that they are exchanging one form of oppressive social system to "escape" into another one, which continues to marginalize women's life experiences in general, but that of the working class, oppressed section even more. The teachings of the church to these sections appear to prime their response to 'peace,' 'humility,' 'acceptance of one's lot,' and most important, that of the very loaded term 'submission,' especially to the men and to the teachings of the Bible as interpreted in the main (read male) stream.

The question is, why then do the Dalits, especially women, continue in their faith and even share it joyfully with others, who also accept it and become part of the faith community as well? Where does the answer to this lie? One looks in vain within the existing theological and pastoral counselling practices within the church for the answer.

It is a serious lacuna that the theology the church has been practicing, especially the mainstream churches, is far from the lived experiences of these masses. Hence we need to note that they seem to have tapped a far deeper lode of faith than is available to them in the mainstream church, one that meets their deepest and unmet needs, and which, one may even add, are not accessible to the present form of doing church or theology, and even to their theologians and pastors. I suggest that the women experience it as a deeply individual form of faith experience, predicated on an intense, one-to-one relationship with Christ. This may be seen in the writings of young Dalit women Theology students as they write their BD and MTh Theses. It may also be seen in the fact that many of these women choose professions which help them reflect this faith experience – nursing, social work, teaching underprivileged children at the school level, grassroots health workers, evangelists, 'prayer warriors,' etc. I know of one young fully-professed Catholic nun from a working-class background who had to leave the convent due to some unpleasant situation. Though her family accepted her back fully, and urged her to marry and "get settled," she replied "No, after having accepted Jesus as my bridegroom I cannot give that place to anyone else." She chose to serve as an attendant in a home for severely disabled children for many years till the opportunity ended. She continues to serve the children of her family and her aged parents in an exemplary manner.

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[19] Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: A South Indian Case Study*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997, 234.

The present form of church life and discourse, especially in the Protestant denominations, perhaps does not adequately reflect this life of willing sacrifice of self in practice, though liturgy and ritual do. This is more so in the Catholic Church with its space for the spirituality of women. It is this mismatch between the women's life and experience that sisters in the US, Latin America and Africa identified as the need for a name of their own.

8. Conclusion

In the year 2006, the Women's Studies Department of the United Theological College, held a consultation titled "Dalit Women's Movements – Leadership and Beyond." The consultation put out a statement in which it announced the setting up of the Dalit Women's Network for Solidarity, or DAWNS, which would

> work to strengthen the voices of Dalit women through building knowledge, working towards ideological clarity, and highlighting the values, visions and aspirations of Dalit Women. It will strive to put their agendas in the mainstream, thereby giving a new shape and direction to socio-political and cultural discourse. It is a conscious effort to break the existing stereotype of Dalit women as mainly activists (doers) who have little to contribute (as thinkers) to

> ideological discourses in society, politics, governance, ethics, economics, and development.[20]

The statement points out the unique realities of Dalit women in India: discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, and class; and diversity of religion, region, and language. It announces the coining of the term *Dalit Womanism* to "better define and understand our lives, because it affirms us in a more holistic way rather than the term 'Feminism' which comes with a lot of baggage."

Further, they ask:

> How are liberative theologies and ideologies reflective of our understanding of reality? How will our knowledge, our voices, our viewpoint, our life experiences and most importantly, our contributions, find a place, a voice a value? Will they also find a place in the midst of the church's teaching and expositions of the Bible? Will our theologians think with us on doing a new theology – a theology of Dalit womanism? Further, will the church show its solidarity with our lot? Will it throw in its lot with the poor and oppressed, and be bothered intellectually, materially and spiritually by us and our lives?[21]

But, they also say, "Whatever the church chooses to do, we have heard His voice, and He says, 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom.'"

This last term – the Kingdom – has been interestingly critiqued by Kwok Pui-lan, who first articulated Asian Feminist Theology, which reflects the multi-cultural, multi-religious context of Asia, with the reality of cultural subjugation of the women, the demand for self-sacrifice and obedience as prized virtues, with communitarian values which place a value on social relationships. Women are thus uniquely disadvantaged and are found on the losing side both theologically and culturally. Hence she terms the use of the word "Kingdom" as sexist, reflecting a culture of dominance. She coins an alternative, more inclusive term: "kin-dom," meaning a community of "kin," which actually reflects our kin identity due to our relationship with God.[22]

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[20] The full statement may be accessed at http://www.womenutc.com/06 documentation_01Evangeline%20DAWNS.htm

[21] http://www.womenutc.com/06 documentation_01Evangeline%20DAWNS.htm

[22] Asisi-Dias: "Christ in Mujerista Theology," cited in Tatha Wiley, *Thinking of Christ: Proclamation, Explanation, Meaning*, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003.

The evolution of the thinking now leads me to feel that while Dalit Women are without doubt one of the most excluded and marginalized groups in India, we do have sisters who may not be Dalits but face the same hardships and exclusions. Further, it is necessary to maintain solidarity with the sisters from the larger sections of the oppressed, which include other groups including but not limited to the Adivasis, the Northeast groups, OBCs, MBCs, etc. Therefore, I propose that the unique experience of Indian women from the subaltern/Dalit groups be given a new name: *Subaltern Indian Womanism*. Thus we will be able to give form and content to our own experiences, interpret, analyse and critique society from our perspective, and shape the discourse in directions which have meaning for us, rather than be told what are our issues. We can give voice to our own visions, exercise our discretion as we see fit, and express our own opinions. We can grow to be our own leaders. We can choose to work with the men on common issues and listen to them and shape their thinking to our thoughts too.

If Dalit women want, rightly, to assert their own specific identities and discriminations (under the term Dalit Womanism) which indeed set them apart from the rest in unique ways such as forced child prostitution through a debased Devadasi system or the ongoing banned practice of manual scavenging, they should be able to do so with the full and principled support of all thinking and sensitive persons, but especially of the women from the subaltern sections of India society, who despite their large numbers are yet to find their common identity and voice. It goes without saying that the religious establishment, especially the church and its leaders, have a key role to play in this process.

Thus the belief and faith of subaltern women who know and love their Creator construct their faith and belief predicated on egalitarian and communitarian values and concepts. Can the Church accept this and mainstream the content of their faith, or will it reject their approach? Will our brothers, fathers, elders, and teachers walk with us on this search for a new Kin-dom?

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PATRIARCHY AND SEXUAL ROLES

Active-Passive Gender Roles versus an Ethics of Mutuality

Shaji George Kochuthara◆

1. Introduction

Biological difference between man and woman is used as a justification to force them into different social roles which shape and limit their attitudes and behaviour. No society has been an exception to this. That is, the society is not satisfied with the natural difference of sex, but adds cultural differences of gender. This makes the physical differences associated with a wide range of psychological and social qualities and characteristics. Consequently, a man is supposed to be masculine, not only male; a woman is supposed to be feminine, not only a female. In other words, to be a man or woman means to behave in a certain way that is shaped and determined by the culture, though the expectations of these behavioural patterns may vary from culture to culture. The modern studies on sexuality and gender have shown that while sex is a biologically given factor, gender is a socially and culturally constructed reality.[1] Often we can find that a circular, often vicious, reasoning is at work in the case of sex and gender. Once the gender difference between men and women is established, it is taken as a further manifestation of the biological differences which confirm the need for different social roles. In other words, "sex differences are used to create gender differences which are then explained as sex differences which, in turn, require gender differences, and so on."[2] Thus, though 'gender' has been connected to the body and biological sexuality, it is the socio-cultural interpretations and misinterpretations that determine the gender difference. In most societies, this cultural construction of gender has been unfavourable to women.

One of the most long-standing and deep-rooted gender polarizations is the concept that in sexual relations men are supposed to take active role

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◆**Dr. Shaji George Kochuthara** holds a doctorate in Moral Theology from the Gregorian University, Rome, and teaches Moral Theology at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. He is also the Chief Editor of *Asian Horizons: Dharmaram Journal of Theology*. His publications include *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2007.

[1] Today, many hold that even sex and sexuality are culturally constructed.

[2] http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/ATLAS_EN/html/the_social_roles_of_men _and_wo.html

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while women are to take passive and submissive role. Gender and feminist studies have focussed more on the social role of women and much lesser on the culturally assigned sexual passivity of women, which in fact is a main reason for the consideration of women as weaker and less important. This polarization results in diminished sexual fulfilment, not only of women, but also of men. Since sexual fulfilment both of man and woman is very important for the stability and well-being of marital life, this issue, which has been much ignored, has to be addressed seriously. Being passive or active does not refer to certain postures or positions in sexual intercourse, but the real question is whether the woman is considered a subject who has the equal right and ability for fulfilment, or an object that is meant only to provide satisfaction for the male partner. Moreover, assigning passive role to women and active role to men encourages different forms of degradation and exploitation of women.

In this article, we shall first try to understand the continuing impact of the gender prejudice that women are sexually passive and the consequent exploitation of women. We shall consider the data from empirical studies and the critical evaluation of the active-passive gender paradigm by Christian ethicists. Following that we shall consider how *Song of Songs*, formulated in a patriarchal background, challenges the notion of passive sexual role assigned to women. In the Scriptures, in general, we find the patriarchal concepts and practices. But, within that tradition itself we find a differing tradition, where woman's desire and fulfilment are acknowledged and presented as the design of God. It is important to make use of the sources (whatever is available!) in fighting the unhealthy gender polarizations that have entered into the tradition. Finally, we shall see the importance of mutuality in a Christian ethic of man-woman relationship.

2. Cultural Prejudice of the Sexual Passivity of Women

In general, cultures have considered women as sexually passive. Similarly, there is a long-standing assumption that women are inherently less sexually inclined than men. Such gender stereotypes result in women being subjected to negative socialization during which they are taught to suppress or deny their sexual feelings. That women engage in sex only to please men and that 'normal women' do not enjoy sex as much as men are some of the gender prejudices coming from this negative socialization.[3]

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[3] Robert Crooks and Karla Baur, *Our Sexuality*, 8th ed., Pacific Grove, CA: Wadsworth, 2002, 74.

Seeking sexual fulfilment would be considered appropriate and normal for a man, but inappropriate for a woman. Woman seeking pleasure, is generally considered a pervert, or as indiscriminate and hence available to any partner. Only passive women and only those who do not enjoy sex or do not express their sexual desire are considered to be women of character. People who adhere to such gender stereotypes think that women who openly express sexual interest or respond sexually are 'easy' or 'sleazy.' On the other hand, active role expected of men conceives them as always virile and supersexual, an expectation that exerts undue pressure on men.[4]

The Greek tradition held the view that women were sexually passive. All females were considered as only passive, subordinate recipients of penetration. The specific Greek verbs for sexual intercourse are usually active when they refer to men and passive when they refer to women. For example, a man penetrates (*peraninei*) a woman, while a woman is penetrated (*perainetai*) by a man; a man marries (*gamizei*) a woman, while a woman is married (*gamizetai*) by a man. This active-passive gender categorization became foundational for the gender polarization in the Western tradition, including the Christian paradigm for gender relationships. It is probable that the Jewish tradition also was influenced by the Greek concept of gender roles. This cultural notion was one of the basic reasons for considering homosexual and lesbian activities as unnatural, since in homosexual relations a man was supposed to take the passive role and in lesbian relations a woman was supposed to the active role. Consequently, homosexual men were often depicted as effeminate males and lesbian women as "having become like men, that is, as trying to transcend the passive, subordinate role accorded to them by nature by attempting to take on a dominant, penetrating role."[5] Taking roots from the Greek tradition, for centuries, gender norms and roles have dictated submission and passivity for women and dominance and agency for men.[6]

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[4] Crooks and Baur, *Our Sexuality*, 74.

[5] Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, 241, 246, 256. This gender categorization can be seen in the condemnation of same-sex unions in the book of *Leviticus*: "You shall not *lie with a male as with a woman*; it is an abomination" (18:22); "*If a man lies with a male as with a woman*, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them" (20:13).

[6] S. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, New York: Knopf, 1954; M. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: A History of Sexuality*, vol. 11, London: Penguin, 1985; Amy K. Kiefer

Subsequently, the one who assumed the active role was considered to be more important and greater than the one who was assigned the passive role. Only in the recent decades feminists started questioning this traditional prejudice against women's sexuality. However, active-passive gender polarization is so deep-rooted that a good number of people, both in the West as well as in other regions, continue to adhere to this notion.

In her challenging work, *Just Love*, moral theologian Margaret A. Farley states:

> It is easy for us today to sing the songs of mutuality in celebration of sexual love. We are in disbelief when we learn that it has not always been so. Yet traditional interpretations of heterosexual sex are steeped in images of the male as active and the female passive, the woman as receptacle and the man as fulfiller, the woman as ground and the man as seed.[7]

Although Farley acknowledges that no other interpretation of the polarity between sexes has had so long and deep-seated influence on men's and women's self-understanding, according to her, "Today we have a completely different view. We have learned that male and female reproductive organs do not signal activity only for one and passivity for the other..."[8]

It is true that the gender categorizations have drastically changed. Farley's opinion may be true to a certain extent with regard to the Western society. However, studies reveal that in traditional societies like India the polarity of active-passive role is still part of the gender concept.[9] During my lectures on "Sexual Fulfilment" for the marriage preparation courses, I usually ask the participants, who according to them should initiate sexual relationship – the husband or wife? Invariably the answer is that only the husband should, and that the wife initiating sexual relationship is

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and Diana T. Sanchez, "Scripting Sexual Passivity: A Gender Role Perspective," *Personal Relationships* 14 (2007), 269-290.

[7] Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, New York, London: Continuum, 2010, 220-221.

[8] Farley, *Just Love*, 221.

[9] L. Abraham, L., "*Bhai-behen*, True Love, Time Pass: Friendships and Sexual Partnerships among Youth in an Indian Metropolis," *Culture Health and Sexuality* 4, 3 (2002), 337-353; L. Abraham, "Redrawing *Lakshman Rekha*: Gender Differences and Cultural Constructions in Youth Sexuality in Urban India," *Sexual Sites and Seminal Attitudes, Studies on Contemporary South Asia*, Number 4, ed. S. Srivastava, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2004; Manas Ranjan Pradhan, "Real Man and Real Woman: Understanding the Gender Dynamics in Orissa, India," *Research and Practice in Social Sciences* 6, 2 (August 2010), 62-69.

something unnatural or awkward. Evidently, the question is not who in an actual relationship should initiate the sexual relationship; that is left to the privacy and spontaneity of the couples. The question targets the deep-rooted gender prejudices in the culture. Often, it is also added that if the woman (wife) takes the initiative, especially in their first sexual encounter, it means that 'she is experienced.' But, to the question, "If the man takes the initiative, doesn't it mean that he is experienced?" only silence or laughter is the answer. This is in fact, an example of the double morality inherent in the active-passive polarization. Indiscriminate sexual behaviour and sexual promiscuity of men are tolerated on the assumption that sexual aggressiveness and inability to control are natural to men.

This active-passive role polarity does not seem to be the problem that continues only in the Indian society, but seems to be prevalent even in the Western societies, as studies have revealed.[10] In spite of the advances American society has made on loosening the rigidity of gender roles in many areas of everyday life, stereotypes about gender roles and sexual behaviour persist. These stereotypes assume that males are innately more interested in sex than females, and males take active role in sex while females are characteristically passive.[11] That is, although the gender stereotypes are beginning to fade, many, especially women, are still influenced by such traditional views.[12] Socialization encourages heterosexual men to take on a sexually empowered, directive, dominant, and assertive role, whereas socialization encourages heterosexual women to take on a sexually disempowered, responsive rather than active role.[13] Although women might engage in passive sexual behaviour for a variety of reasons, such as having a dominant partner or from a lack of sexual desire, conformity to gender roles is a primary reason for this behaviour.[14] Thus, social constructions of sexuality persist in the modern era. In movies, magazines, television sitcoms, soap operas, and mainstream literature, we see that female passivity and male agency are depicted.[15] Women's tendency to associate sex nonconsciously with submission reflects these norms.[16]

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[10] D. T. Sanchez, A. K. Kiefer and O. Ybarra, "Sexual Submissiveness in Women: Costs for Sexual Autonomy and Arousal," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32 (2006), 512-524; D. T. Sanchez, J. Crocker and K. R. Boike, "Doing Gender in the Bedroom: How Investment in Gender Norms Affects the Sexual Experience," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31 (2005), 1445-1455; R. Coward, *Female Desires*, New York: Grove Press, 1985; H. F. Tevlin, and S. R. Leiblum, "Sex Role Stereotypes and Female Sexual Dysfunction," in V. Franks and E. D. Rothblum, ed., *The Stereotyping of Women: Its Effects on Mental Health*, New York: Springer, 1983, 129-150; Salynn Boyles, "Many Women Link Sex with Submission" in *Foxnews.com*, Monday, July 25, 2005, http://www.foxnews.com /story/0,2933,163267,00.html.

[11] William H. Masters, Virginia E. Johnson and Robert C. Kolodny, *Human Sexuality*, 5th ed., New York: Longman, 1995, 299.

[12] Crooks and Baur, *Our Sexuality*, 74.

[13] P. Blumstein and P. Schwarz, *American Couples: Money, Work, and Sex*, New York: William Morrow, 1983; P. Schwartz and V. Rutter, *The Gender of*

4. Active-Passive Polarization and Sexual Fulfilment

The gender stereotype of the sexual passivity of women affects the self-esteem of women and results in diminished levels of sexual fulfilment of women as well as men. Active-passive polarization destroys the autonomy and initiative of the woman and imposes on the man the responsibility of satisfying his partner. Consequently, sexual passivity undermines sexual autonomy in intimate relationships and results in diminished sexual fulfilment.

> A woman who feels compelled to accept a passive female role may have a very difficult time initiating sex. It could be even harder for her to assume an active role during sexual activity. Many women are frustrated, regretful, and understandably angry that such cultural expectations are so deeply ingrained within our society.[17]

Often, even today, women seem to internalize the female sexual role of submission. In the process of fitting their sexual behaviour and desires into this cultural mould, women may unwittingly undermine their sexual arousal.[18] When sexual intimacy becomes active for one partner and passive for the other, sexual relationships are no more mutual. Lack of mutuality leads to reduced levels of satisfaction for both. It is sexual

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Sexuality, 2nd ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2000; S. Sprecher and K. McKinney, *Sexuality*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993.

[14] Amy K. Kiefer and Diana T. Sanchez, "Scripting Sexual Passivity: A Gender Role Perspective," *Personal Relationships*, 14 (2007), 272.

[15] C. N. Baker, "Images of Women's Sexuality in Advertisements: A Content Analysis of Black- and White-oriented Women and Men's Magazines," *Sex Roles* 52 (2005), 13-27; J. Kilbourne, *Can't Buy Me Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel*, New York: Touchstone, 1999; Diana T. Sanchez, Amy K. Kiefer and Oscar Ybarra, "Sexual Submissiveness in Women: Costs for Sexual Autonomy and Arousal," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32 (2006), 513.

[16] Kiefer and Sanchez, "Scripting Sexual Passivity," 285.

[17] Crooks and Baur, *Our Sexuality*, 75.

[18] Sanchez, Kiefer and Ybarra, "Sexual Submissiveness in Women," 522.

autonomy that promotes both men's and women's sexual function and satisfaction and hence passive behaviour means reduced sexual functioning and satisfaction for both men and women.[19] Based on such empirical data, moral theologian Christine E. Gudorf observes that, "The sexes must jointly take active responsibility for mutually pleasurable sex, both because justice demands it, and because the more active a participant to sex is, the more sexually satisfied he or she is likely to be."[20] Gudorf considers the continuing influence of the gender roles in sexual relationships as one of the obstacles to sexual fulfilment.

Many women grow up believing that men always have sex on their minds. For such a woman, it may be a logical next step to become the controller of what takes place during sexual interaction. A woman may see her role as controlling her male partner's rampant lust by making certain he does not coerce her into unacceptable activities. Thus, instead of experiencing sexual fulfilment, her concern will be to control the active partner. On the other hand, men are often conditioned to see women as sexual challenges and to go as far as they can during sexual encounters. They may be confused or even threatened by a woman who switches roles from controller to active initiator.[21]

A woman may react to her gender-role stereotype by accepting the notion that from a sexual viewpoint she is a second-class citizen. She may consistently ignore her own needs for her own physical gratification and think that things are fine sexually as long as and because her 'man' is satisfied. She may be afraid to ask from a partner the kind and amount of sexual attention that is pleasing to her on the mistaken impression that to do so is inappropriate, that it does not fit the feminine gender role in the sexual sphere. The response of the female may even be worse if a woman who is bound by belief to the male-dominant, female-submissive gender role subjects herself to physical and emotional abuse within sexual situations because she does not really think that she has the right to stand up for herself.[22]

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[19] Kiefer and Sanchez, "Scripting Sexual Passivity," 272.

[20] Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex and Pleasure*: *Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1994, 146.

[21] Crooks and Baur, *Our Sexuality*, 76.

[22] Masters, Johnson and Kolodny, *Human Sexuality*, 300.

3. Active-Passive Polarization and Exploitation of Women

The active-passive paradigm considers the woman as unequal, weaker and inferior. This facilitates many forms of exploitation of women and violence against them. Men who adhere to the active-passive model may find it as a justification for coercive sex. Sometimes, resistance from the part of the woman may be even interpreted as techniques to invite the 'active' role from the man. Since, in any heterosexual relationship the man, according to this paradigm, is supposed to take the active role, woman's resistance will be ignored as natural responses of a 'good' woman. Thus, men may consider even the disapproval and resistance by women as legitimising their violence. Similarly, any kind of interest shown by the woman may be interpreted by a man adhering to the active-passive model as an indirect invitation from a woman playing the passive role and hence legitimizing force from the 'active' man. Moreover, women who differ from the traditional model of passivity by the way they mingle with men, or the way they dress, may be viewed as 'loose' women or as 'easily accessible.' In such cases men may justify sexual violence arguing that they were provoked by the woman or that it was not an act of sexual violence since the woman was of 'loose' morality, or that they were encouraged by the indirect invitation of the woman.[23] These kinds of violence may take place within marriage, in the context of dating or friendship or even with strangers.

Objectification of women is a natural outcome of the passive gender role assigned to women. Often, the woman is made a passive object to prove the masculinity of the man. The whole existence of the woman is interpreted in terms of the needs and satisfaction of the man who is active. This objectification is evident in pornography. Most of pornography targets the male viewers. Even when the woman may appear to take an active role, the whole intent is to satisfy the desire of the male audience, and hence even in the apparent 'active' role, the woman is made a passive object. Moreover, adherence to active-passive model compels women to accept themselves as objects and understand their worth only in terms of their being objects for the satisfaction of the males, because that is the only way for them to fulfil their sexual needs. Objectification of women by men and objectification by themselves have negative consequences for the psychological, as well as physical, health of women.[24]

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[23] Studies have revealed that such attitudes are a major reason behind date-rape. For example, in a study on male high school students, 39% of them said that it was justifiable to force a girl to have sex if she is drunk. In another study, men consistently reported forcing a woman into sex as justifiable if she asked him out, went to his apartment or to a party or 'parking,' if she wore sexy clothes, if she kissed him voluntarily, or if she drank alcohol. See R. Giarrusso, "Adolescents' Cues and Signals: Sex and Assault," in P. Johnson, ed., *Acquaintance Rape and Adolescent Sexuality*, symposium papers published by the Western Psychological Association, San Diego, CA, 1979; C. Muhlenhard and S. Andrews, "Open Communication about Sex: Will It Reduce Risk Factors Related to Rape?" paper presented at Association for Advancement of Behaviour Therapy, Houston, 1985: As referred to in Gudorf, *Body, Sex and Pleasure*, 123-124.

Active-passive paradigm legitimises the sado-masochist tendencies. The woman may interpret the pain inflicted upon her as legitimate, since that is necessary for the satisfaction of the male active partner. Consequently, she may identify her satisfaction with the pain, which is demanded for the satisfaction of the active partner. Similarly, male partner's demands may be accepted by the female partner, even if they do not give her any sexual fulfilment and even if they may be humiliating her.

Active-passive model has its consequences for male sexuality as well. Males are supposed to be aggressive and hence the whole meaning of their sexuality is reduced to virility and their ability to dominate and satisfy the female partner. As a result, the aspects of tenderness and affection become ignored and undeveloped. Gender stereotypes can cause a man to turn into a macho man who ignores or misread his female partner's cues or who considers sexual encounter solely as something that he does to the female partner. The masculine stereotype can create tremendous sexual performance anxieties for a man, making him wonder if he can possibly be as 'manly' as the gender stereotype says he should be. These anxieties may cause him to withdraw emotionally from intimacy, or avoid sexual contact altogether.[25] Christian ethicist Gudorf points out that although the society has begun to accept women's right to sexual fulfilment, the male domination is not abandoned and this increases the male anxiety around sex:

> It is too often the case that as persons in our society come to accept that women should find sex pleasurable, the existing pattern of male domination in sex is not abandoned, but merely enlarged, so that women are in effect pressured to find sex pleasurable, and men are

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[24] For a detailed analysis of objectification theory and the consequences of objectification, see Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts, "Objectification Theory: Towards Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks," *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21 (1997), 173-206.

[25] Masters, Johnson and Kolodny, *Human Sexuality*, 299-300.

> ordered to take responsibility for women's pleasure. Responsibility for women's pleasure as well as their own is an onerous burden for men, and is often the source of a great deal of male anxiety around sex.[26]

5. *Song of Songs*: Biblical Model of a Woman Who Is 'Active'

As already mentioned, to overcome the gender role stereotypes, it is important to make use of the available sources in our faith tradition. In general we can say that the biblical tradition is patriarchal. Within the biblical tradition itself, however, we can see books, stories, anecdotes and other passages which challenge the patriarchal concept. Moreover, the way the Bible was interpreted often reinstated the patriarchal concept. Re-discovery of the original message by biblical scholars has helped to challenge the traditional patriarchal concepts attributed to the Bible.

In the biblical literature, *Song of Songs* is unique in many respects. It can be said to be a biblical model of erotic love. Although for many centuries it was interpreted symbolically as depicting the love between Yahweh and Israel, Christ and the Church, modern biblical scholarship is almost unanimous in considering it as describing the love between a man and a woman. Another unique feature of this book is its depiction of female sexuality and female sexual desire. Contrary to the often held view that the biblical tradition, promotes patriarchy, in *Song of Songs* we have a model where the traditional patriarchal concepts vanish. The book does not depict the picture of a usual Israelite couple, where the husband claims exclusive power over his wife's devotion, and where the existence of the wife is understood in terms of her service to the husband, especially as a means of procreating male children to continue his lineage. The book presents a woman who is well aware of her beauty, worth and desire and who is bold enough to acknowledge them; the husband is drawn by to her understanding her value as a person, acknowledging her worth and her desire. David M. Carr beautifully articulates it as follows:

> Elsewhere in the bible, passionate women are often caricatured as promiscuous and wild, unless their passion is for having sons who will ultimately become the ancestors of Israel and its kings. Powerful women like Delilah and Jezebel are images of danger. Yet the *Song of Songs* ultimately celebrates this powerful, passionate woman. It is her voice that is featured through more than two-thirds of the book, and parallel to the praise of the "woman of power" in *Proverbs* 31, the man and others in the song end up praising her incomparable worth.

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[26] Gudorf, *Body, Sex and Pleasure*, 146.

Moreover, the often overpowering male of Israel's legal and prophetic texts is replaced here with a male passionately bound to the woman who loves him. He is captivated by but one of her glances, but one of the strands of her necklace (*Song of Songs* 4:9). He stands in awe of her beauty, imaging her in ever more majestic ways as he continues his pursuit of her. Unlike many other biblical male characters, he is not filled with anxiety about infidelity or promiscuity.[27]

The very opening of the *Song* is marked the expression of the sensuousness and desire of the woman:

> O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth!
> For your love is better than wine (1:2).

Even the memory of the sensations of his embrace is pleasurable:

> O that his left hand were under my head,
> and that his right hand embraced me! (2:6)

On the other hand, we find a man who is not ashamed to declare his loving dependence on the woman and how much he values her. He does not consider it as undermining his masculinity:

> You have captured my heart, my sister, oh bride!
> You have captured my heart with one of your glances,
> With but one of the strands of your necklace (4:9).

The man praises the beauty of his beloved:

> How graceful are your feet in sandals, O queenly maiden!
> Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand.
> Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine.
> Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies.
> Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle.
> Your neck is like an ivory tower.
> Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rab'bim.
> Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, overlooking Damascus.
> Your head crowns you like Carmel,
> and your flowing locks are like purple;
> a king is held captive in the tresses.
> How fair and pleasant you are,
> O loved one, delectable maiden! (7:1-6)

It is not a pornographic description of the female beauty, but the recognition of the beauty and worth of the beloved by the lover, her worth as a woman. He is not ashamed to say that he is captured by her beauty.

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[27] D. M. Carr, *The Erotic Word*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003,133.

This was something unusual in the Israelite context, since the worth of a woman would be recognised by a man only in terms of her utility of providing male children to him.

But, what can be said to be characteristic of the *Song* is that the bride/beloved is not at all ashamed to describe the physical beauty of her lover. Her courage to acknowledge her sensuality and her pleasure in the physical beauty of her lover makes the *Song* something unique. She is not afraid that she will be considered as a pervert or sexual maniac; she is not anxious that her lover himself may be shocked by her erotic enjoyment of him and may consider her a freak. She expresses her desire and erotic enjoyment as natural and she is confident that her lover understands her:

His head is the finest gold; ...
His cheeks are like beds of spices, yielding fragrance.
His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh.
His arms are rounded gold, set with jewels.
His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires.
His legs are alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold...
His speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable (5:11-16).

Here we do not have the picture of a woman who is passive, who understands her as an object of the male desire and an instrument of his enjoyment. The woman, as the man, is an active subject. In the *Song* we cannot trace the traditional active-passive gender polarization; instead, we meet a couple who are both active and receptive. The image is not that of a man possessing and controlling the woman and her sexuality, but of mutual possession and belonging to each other: "My beloved is mine and I am his" (2:16); "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine" (6:3); "I am my beloved's and his desire is for me" (7:10). In this way, the *Song* challenges the dependence-dominance paradigm after the Fall: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen 3.16). This relationship based on dependence-dominance is the effect of sin: "The sexual relationship which offers promise of loving unity becomes, through sin, an occasion of exploitation, dominance, and manipulation."[28] This connotes that many existing cultural and psychological dimensions of woman-man relationship are not the will of God, but are characteristics of the diminished existence brought about by sin. But, man-woman relationship founded on dominance-dependence was not the original design of God. The ideal of man-woman relationship, as presented in the Yahwist creation narrative (Genesis 2:4b-25), is that of mutuality, interdependence and inter-subjectivity. The *Song* celebrates the original and uncontaminated beauty of the man-woman love, which is mutual and in which both of them have equal roles. Through the bold expression of mutual desire, the couple in the *Song* celebrates the mutuality, which is the original design of God.

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[28] D. G. McCarthy, E. J. Bayer, and J. A. Leies, eds., *Handbook on Critical Sexual Issues*, Braintree, Massachusetts: The Pope John XXIII Centre, 1989, 4.

Although mutuality of desire and enjoyment is the ideal presented, for our consideration, the *Song* becomes unique due to its recognition of the female sexual desire. As Carey Ellen Walsh puts it,

> A woman's sexuality is developed, sustained, and celebrated, not as object, but from a woman's perspective and that of her male lover. Throughout the book, in first person voice, the woman retains control of her fate, of her pleasure. Hence, she is never in danger of being commodified... the woman retains autonomy over her desire and its satisfaction. She is in complete control of her sexuality, her voice offering it willingly, wantingly to her lover.[29]

This extraordinarily positive approach to female sexuality has evoked some theologians to attribute female authorship to the *Song*. For example, Athalya Brenner holds that although no concluding proofs can be reached, there are compelling evidences for asserting female authorship of the *Song*.[30] Drawing upon this strong feminist note (as well as some other unique characteristics of it), Jannie H. Hunter contends that the *Song* was written as a protest literature. As pointed out, there is no doubt that the *Song* was written within the context of a patriarchal society. However, the values that the *Song* indirectly stands for are so different from those of a patriarchal society. So, Hunter argues:

> The *Song of Songs* then, I contend, presents itself as a song of protest in a society within which women are not allowed to speak openly on many matters where they desire to express an opinion. The book takes as its theme an experience with which every woman of the day would have been familiar, a situation which society would have pressured her into – namely, a (loving) relationship with a man. By so doing the *Song of Songs* is able to demonstrate against the

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[29] Carey Ellen Walsh, "A Startling Voice: Woman's Desire in the *Song of Songs*," *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 28, 4 (1999), 133.

[30] A. Brenner, "Women Poets and Authors," in *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, Sheffield 1995, 86-97; Also, see J. H. Hunter, "The Song of Protest," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 90 (2000), 115.

> prevailing social constructs and to evince the fact that the issue of love can never be one of force because its central emotion is one that functions in relation to choice. Above all, women – as well as men – cannot turn on this emotion of love within a relationship of force but only in one of emotional will. A central desire experienced by every human being is thus taken as providing an occasion to demonstrate about a central problem in society on behalf of those who suffer the most under the prevailing rules of that society.[31]

Thus, though written in a patriarchal context, *Song of Songs* depicts the mutual love, desire and sexual fulfilment of a man and a woman. The man does neither feel ashamed of his loving dependency on the woman, nor does he consider her as a sexual pervert, since she takes an active role; his masculinity is not threatened by this active role played by his beloved. Instead, he enjoys it and appreciates her. The woman does not confine herself to the traditional gender roles of a patriarchal society. She considers her desire and feelings as legitimate and she is proud of being herself. She is not afraid that her lover may consider her as a pervert or 'loose' woman as she expresses her desire and enjoyment. Instead she is confident that her lover understands, accepts her and is proud of her as she is.

6. Active-Passive Role versus Mutuality

The acceptance of the equal dignity of man and woman demands abandoning of the active-passive gender categorization and the acceptance of mutuality as the basic norm for man-woman relationship. The Christian tradition was not an exception in considering women as passive and thus practically ignoring female sexual desire and fulfilment. In the recent decades, however, Christian ethicists have been recognising the need of challenging the active-passive paradigm and emphasising the need of a sexual ethics founded on mutuality. This does not mean that everything has changed. At least in the conceptual level, women's identity and equal dignity as a sexual person is recognised. It may take much longer time for acceptance in the practical level, since the active-passive categorizations was one of the most long-standing and deep-rooted gender stereotypes.

Mark Oraison observes: "The first word coming to mind (*while considering the different aspects of sexual intercourse*) is mutual pleasure or, better, mutual sensual pleasure: to give sensual pleasure to the other and to receive sensual pleasure from the other – this, in a word, is the apparent ideal of the sexual exchange."[32] That is, mutuality in sexual relationships and sexual fulfilment is considered one of the basic norms. Sexual encounter is not the encounter of one who is active and the other who is passive, but the meeting of two who are active and receptive. It is an encounter where both give and receive. Lack of mutuality in sexual intimacy and trying to exclude the partner from sexual pleasure will diminish the pleasure not only of the one excluded, but also of the one that uses the partner for pleasure. Using the partner or considering the partner as an object will result in the inability to feel any of the reflected pleasures of the other. For those who respect mutuality, the pleasure resulting from the pleasure of the partner is powerful.[33] Gudorf points out that mutuality in sexual pleasure implies also mutual consent to sexual intimacy. She shows that even in marriage very often sexual intercourse takes place without the consent of the partner.[34] Howard J. Clinebelle and Charlotte H. Clinebelle also emphasise mutuality in conjugal sexual intimacy and say that couples should be free to follow their own impulses sexually, to play and experiment with new positions, new settings, and new approaches to foreplay. Open communication about what gives each maximum pleasure is greatly helpful for developing a unique style.[35] In other words, mutuality presupposes abandoning of the active-passive gender stereotype. As we have seen above, sexual autonomy is a pre-requisite for the sexual satisfaction of both man and woman.

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[31] J. H. Hunter, "The Song of Protest," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 90 (2000), 115.

Mutuality in sexual intimacy means respecting the partner, knowing what is pleasurable to the partner and giving importance to the pleasure of the partner. It may not be contested that the search for selfish pleasure does not give real pleasure to oneself or to one's partner. At the same time, enjoying pleasure in sexual intimacy is not selfishness, if mutuality is respected. On the contrary, enjoying pleasure in sexual intimacy is an integral part of mutuality. Active-passive model, on the other hand, ignores the fulfilment of the woman, since her role is defined in terms of 'pleasing' the male partner, and being available to him. According to

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[32] Mark Oraison, *The Human Mystery of Sexuality*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967, 124.

[33] Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex and Pleasure*, 119-120.

[34] Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex and Pleasure*, 141-143.

[35] H. J. Clinebelle Jr. and C. H. Clinebelle, *The Intimate Marriage*, New York: Harper and Row, 1970, 143.

Häring, the acceptance and enjoyment of the pleasure by each partner is necessary so that the conjugal act becomes a positive experience:

> The conjugal act would become distasteful if one of the spouses were to try to refuse its pleasure and thus kill the joy of being-together, being one flesh. The deeper the meaning in true love in mutual self-bestowal, the greater is the joy and pleasure also.[36]

The twofold responsibility of the spouses is, "to give sexual fulfilment, and to strive to achieve it."[37] This giving and receiving is very important in sexual intimacy:

> In sex, if one partner is consistently acting to pleasure the other person without openness to receiving pleasure him/herself, the pleasure of both persons in the relationship decreases. The active partner can over time become the controlling partner, which both partners can come to resent."[38]

Mutuality entails

> some form of activity and receptivity, giving and receiving – two sides of one shared reality on the part of and within both persons. It requires, to some degree, mutuality of desire, action, and response. Two liberties meet, two bodies meet, two hearts come together – metaphorical and real description of sexual mutuality.[39]

Even here, extremes are to be avoided. Perhaps a couple may never grow into perfect mutuality; or, perhaps they may take a long time to grow into real mutuality. But, what is needed is to avoid the gender polarization, and to see each partner as active and responsible in the sexual encounter.

The norm of mutual pleasure presupposes the recognition of the sexual identity of the woman and her sexual desire. If desire and pleasure are defined only in terms of the male experience and only as those belonging to the male, then the question of mutuality is out of question. Even today, in many of the cultures, expression of sexual desire and enjoyment of sexual pleasure by the woman will be considered as something unbecoming even within marriage. Some may feel that it is strange to say that about a world that lives in the age of sexual revolution.

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[36] Bernard Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, vol. 2, Middlegreen, Slough: St Paul Publication, 1979, 514.

[37] J. Bird and L. Bird, *The Freedom of Sexual Love*, New York: Doubleday, 1967, 54.

[38] Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex and Pleasure*, 116.

[39] Farley, *Just Love*, 222.

But, for example, think about the virtues related to sexuality, such as virginity, fidelity, chastity, modesty, etc. They are often identified more as virtues of the female, and lapses in these from the part of the male will be tolerated more easily and considered as natural weakness of the male. It is not my view that women also should be given the freedom to be licentious, but that a sexual ethics that understands desire and fulfilment only in masculine terms will lead to double standards and encourage further the objectification and exploitation of women, and the ill-treatment of the female partner. An ethics that recognises female sexual desire will demand equal responsibility from the part of the male. Moreover, accepting the woman as an equal partner having sexual desire will facilitate building up a relationship of mutual respect and sharing.

Abandoning the active-passive paradigm and recognising the sexual identity of the woman implies an ethical responsibility of understanding the difference in the physiology of sexual response in the man and in the woman. The difference in man-woman sexual response is obvious especially from the difference in the way of experiencing orgasm. This difference demands an attitude of reciprocal understanding, self-domination and harmonious realization of the different phases of sexual behaviour. Adequate information regarding the physiology of sexual behaviour and differences in the sexual response patterns of the sexes are necessary for man-woman sexual relationship based on mutuality. Sufficient knowledge of one's own physiology and sexual response patterns as well as those of the partner will only help the couple appreciate and enjoy the God-given gift of sexuality and sexual love. It is with this insight that Jack Dominian opines:

> In the future the morality of sexual intercourse will include how patient the spouses are to prepare each other for lovemaking and how patient and disciplined they are to reach orgasm together, thus ensuring that one does not peak earlier than the other, leaving one partner unsatisfied.[40]

That is, sufficient knowledge about the different dimensions of one's own sexuality and that of the partner and sufficient knowledge of sexual response cycle is a moral responsibility. Even in this age of sexual revolution, a number of people, even after years of living together, lack sufficient knowledge of sexuality, especially that of the partner. In the male-dominant cultures, this naturally results in the denial of woman's enjoyment.

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[40] Jack Dominian, *Let's Make Love: The Meaning of Sexual Intercourse*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001, 91.

7. Conclusion

Active-Passive gender role has been one of the most long-standing gender polarizations in different cultures. In spite of the drastic changes in gender perceptions, this polarity continues even today. Active-passive paradigm denies the sexual autonomy of the woman, considers her as an object, and facilitates the exploitation of the woman in different forms. Moreover, such a model diminishes the sexual fulfilment of both men and women. Instead of active-passive or dominance-dependence model, what is needed is a sexual ethics based on the principle of mutuality and reciprocity, where both the man and the woman are active and receptive, where both are subjects. The contemporary culture, particularly from the time of sexual revolution, attempts to present as role model a liberated woman who seeks pleasure indiscriminately and asserts her identity as a sexual person, because denial of the sexual desire and fulfilment of the woman was integral to a patriarchal sexual ethics. Facilitating the sexual autonomy of women and developing a sexual ethics of women's sexual fulfilment is important to respond to the challenges that marriage and family face today. This does not mean that we need to blindly adapt to the ideals of the contemporary culture. Instead, we need to reflect upon whether we can develop an ethics of women's desire and fulfilment based on the Christian tradition. Moreover, creating an awareness of women's sexual desire and fulfilment is a matter of justice.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Hans Waldenfels, ***In-Between: Essays in Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue.*** Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2011, pages xii + 156, ISBN: 978-81-89958-47-3.

In-Between, consisting of six chapters, is originally the annual Dharma Endowment Lectures of 2011, conducted by the Faculty of Philosophy, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. The book has the interesting title *In-Between*. The first chapter explains human being as a being in-between. From womb to tomb he is in-between. The whole drama of his life is played out in-between. In the family, in the school, in the place of work, in the place of recreation, everywhere he is in-between. He is in-between fellow human beings, animals, and other creatures. This in-between can have several dimensions. Sometimes he is united with his fellow human beings in love and friendship; sometimes he depends on others for his wellbeing and even for his survival; there are also instances, when he uses and exploits them for his selfish interests (5-6).

The second chapter reminds us of the fact that religion plays a crucial role in man's being in-between. In today's world of extra-fast mobility, intercommunication, and globalisation, the in-between of persons has very evident social dimensions. We may say that any part of the world has become multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi-religious. Today there is a general tendency to understand religion as the 'way.' The many 'ways' connected with Zen Buddhism are known even in the western world. They are 'concrete ways,' which influence the daily life of ordinary people. When we turn our attention to Christianity, 'religion' is not a biblical concept. However, 'way' is a central concept in the teachings of Jesus (42-43).

The third chapter deals with the theme "Secular Age." The author reminds us of the fact that a human person's being in-between has not only a horizontal but also a vertical aspect. We could say that man's immanence is crossed by transcendence (49-50). In other words, man lives between heaven and earth. However, in modern times this type of deliberation is confronted with a sudden rupture. Many do not believe any more in a heaven. Earth alone remains the beginning and end of their existence. In May 2011, the worldwide known German playboy Gunter Sachs committed suicide. Then, a German newspaper wrote: "Gunter Sachs created his orders himself. He did not want to be in the hands of a blindly working fate." Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is perhaps one of the

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pioneers of this line of thinking with his 'death of God philosophy'. This new situation is called today 'secular society', 'secular world', or 'secular city' (50-51). Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher of Catholic origin, affirms that modern man is confronted with the possibility to choose between belief and unbelief. Today it is possible to live in the society without believing in God's existence (62).

In the fourth chapter, the author reminds us of the fact that in the intercultural and interreligious encounter language has a crucial role to play. In the general process of communication language is the most important factor. My partner in dialogue should first understand what I am talking about. This is all the more true in the context of India, where numerous languages and dialects are spoken (72).

The fifth chapter emphasises the point that the terms 'intercultural' and 'interreligious' remind us of the fact that the encounter between cultures and religions is a multidimensional undertaking in which all have to be sincere and open to learn from the other (109). Dialogue should not be used as a tactical means to impose one's own view on the other. '*Inter*' means that we start from different angles of the world and meet somewhere *in-between* (117).

The sixth chapter discusses the Divine in the form of Buddha and Christ. Their vision, words, and actions still influence the world history. They originated from ethnically limited historical contexts: Buddhism was born from Hindu background; Christianity has Jewish roots. However, both movements till today attract people from all races and nations; they are world religions (120). In Buddhism, the term expressing the liberating experience is negative '*nirvāṇa*', extinguishing, blowing away, so that 'nothing' is left and yet 'nothingness' is not the appropriate translation, if it means the nihilistic nothing; *śūnyatā* = emptiness. It needs an ascetic, spiritual, and meditative approach to realize the true meaning of 'emptiness' (128).

For a long time the smilingly squatting enlightened Buddha and the painfully hanging and dying Christ on the cross seemed to be unable to meet. The famous Japanese philosopher Keiji Nishitani commented on the Christian confession to the kenotic Christ in the *Letter to the Philippians* 2:5-8. For Christ taking the form of man and becoming a servant is "making himself empty." According to Nishitani, the central Buddhist notion of *śūnyatā*, emptiness, finds a beautiful parallel in the notion of *kenosis*, self-emptying of Christ as explained by St. Paul (129-131).

Prof. Waldenfels' profound expertise and vast experience in the field of intercultural and interreligious dialogue are clearly evident in this book. He does not hesitate to proclaim his firm conviction that finally humanity shall not survive without belief and a religious option (4). He brings to our attention also another very important and interesting point. The term inculturation was coined by theologians and missiologists after the Vatican Council II to describe the process of introducing the Gospel to new social and cultural environments. This term was considered characterising a positive attitude of the Church towards other religions and cultures. According to Prof. Waldenfels, however, inculturation is in fact a one-way action focusing on the transfer of western civilizing and cultural values in the name of Christianity. Therefore, supported by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, Prof. Wladenfels pleads for a change in the terminology from inculturation to "interculturation" (96). This term clearly implies mutuality and not one-sidedness. The term interculturation invites all to a readiness to learn from one another.

Of course, intercultural and interreligious dialogue is not an entirely new theme, because especially after the Vatican Council II, there were a lot of academic and practical activities in this field. However, the present work has a comprehensiveness and originality of its own. Therefore, *In-Between* could be a very useful guide for all those who are engaged in any sort of interreligious and intercultural endeavours.

Alex Thannippara

Peter Tyler, ***The Return to the Mystical: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Teresa of Avila and the Christian Mystical Tradition*****,** London and New York, Continuum International Publishing House, 2011, pages: xix+275; ISBN: 978-1-4411-0444-1.

This is an extraordinary book, blending mysticism with philosophy, creative synthesis with critical analysis and Teresa of Avila with Ludwig Wittgenstein. Though began with a fascination and enthusiasm for two giants in the field, the book is the result of persistent and meticulous research for ten years, exploring the interaction between these two great authors in depth both in style and content. Both the authors are exciting and exasperating; exciting because they seem to be saying something original and deep, exasperating because they seem to use certain style and method to confuse the reader rather than to make things clear. Peter Tyler is successful in showing that style is as important as content in understanding these great figures and that changing the style of thinking and living is at the heart of these writers.

As a Carmelite and as a student of Wittgensteinian thoughts, I think, Dr. Peter Tyler is successful in following the methodology of Wittgenstein, that of assembling reminders, criss-crossing the terrain, than of constructing sustained deductive arguments on what he calls *theologia mystica*, to refer to the 'language game' that was developed in the mystical schools of the High Middle Ages, after Dionysius the Areopagite. By bringing out how Teresa and Wittgenstein enlightened him in providing a *Blick* of *theologia mystica*, he shows how they might intelligibly illumine all who attend to their writings carefully. What the book, thus, provides is a threefold insight, moving from Saying to Showing to Acting, illuminated by Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations and Teresa's mystical explorations.

The detailed bibliography of primary texts and secondary works as well as the index are very useful for scholars and students of Teresa and Wittgenstein. The author's mastery of the original languages, Spanish and German, brings out nuances in his own translations.

The book begins by the question 'What is Mystical Anyway?" Applying Wittgensteinian methodology that navigates between the boundaries of quasi-ontological, cross-credal category of modern mysticism and the constructivist approaches, Dr. Tyler presents a 'mystical speech' which is neither de-psychologized nor overly ontological. Mysticism is not a 'something' that we can identify in a person like colour of the eye or DNA, but it is not a 'nothing' either. Wittgenstein observed 'Not empiricism and yet realism in philosophy, that is the hardest thing' (*Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* 325). This is true about our discourse on mystics, mystical experience and the mystical. The experience, language and truth are related not just empirically but logically. We experience more than what we speak about, we speak about more than what we systematise. This is true about the language on mystical, even by Teresa or Wittgenstein. In his explorations on *The Return to the Mystical*, Tyler could have hit the nail more on the head, increasing the value of the book, if he had paid greater attention to the complex net work of realism, empiricism and logic. Wittgensteinian strategies of language game, family resemblance and form of life have metaphysical import, not just epistemological value. Without this ontological dimension *theologia mystica* would also slip into (empty chatter) rather than 'life question.'

After briefly exploring the problem of understanding Wittgenstein, in the labyrinth of interpretations of earlier, later, new and third Wittgenstein, neither committing himself fully to the theoretical or therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein, the author proposes a way of seeing, after Wittgenstein, a *Weltblick* rather than *Weltanschaung*, in the second chapter. The author isolates the move from thinking to seeing to acting, and offers to showing the character of performative discourses and linguistic strategies of elucidating both Wittgenstein and Teresa of Avila.

The part two of the book deals with investigating the evolution of the *theologia mystica*, by criss-crossing the terrain of twelfth/thirteenth-century Latin revival of the works of Dionysius in the Parisian and German schools, journeying to its culmination in the convents and friaries of Renaissance Spain. The aim of the section is not to cover every aspect of the medieval mystical tradition, but to trace one strand of its influence. The sections on the mystical strategies of Dionysius and the *theologia mystica* and the chapters on the medieval flowering of this tradition and the emergence of the Spanish School are particularly useful for any serious student of Christian mysticism.

Tyler concludes his work in part three, by returning to the life and works of Wittgenstein and Teresa, showing their family resemblance, similarities and differences of their strategies of unknowing – the direction of locution, contradiction, avoiding conclusions, disorientation, humour, ordinary speech, and strategies of affectivity. The work is successful in showing that these are brilliant strategies and not drawbacks of the writings of these authors. This is a work of mutual fecundation: how Wittgenstein could throw light on the mystical strategies employed by Teresa and how Teresa could enlighten careful readers on Wittgenstein's baffling 'religious point view.' What is surprising is the fact that 'Their strategies interrupt the spontaneous, unselfconscious flow of our ongoing 'mental' activity forcing us to re-evaluate our place in the world and our attitude to it' (Introduction, xiv). This is very rewarding philosophically and religiously.

The concluding postscript shows that *theologia mystica* is a life question and not a scientific question. One is reminded of Wittgenstein's statement in the Tractatus, "We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched" (6.52) and his remark, "One of the things Christianity says amongst others, I believe, is that all sound doctrines are useless. You have to change your *life*. (Or the *direction* of your life)" (*Culture and Value*, 61; MS 132 167:11.10.1946). Life of the mystic would decide whether something is 'empty chatter' or a 'life question.' Dr. Tyler has brilliantly shown that in the case of Teresa and Wittgenstein, the *theologia mystica* is a life question. Indeed this is also an invitation to the reader to make the chatter a life question. Tyler's threefold insight, moving from Saying to Showing to Acting will find fruits in mystical forms life; only in the stream of life do words and deeds have meaning!

Jose Nandhikkara

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The Managing Editor
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Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram
Dharmaram College P. O.
Bangalore 560 029, India
Tel. +91-80-4111 6213; Fax: +91-80-4111 6000
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